



SEATTLE MARINERS NEWS CLIPS

July 6, 2011



Originally published Tuesday, July 5, 2011 at 10:16 PM

Extra effort gets Mariners past Oakland in 10 innings, 4-2

By Geoff Baker

Seattle Times staff reporter

OAKLAND, Calif. — Teams that struggle to score like the Mariners often need to get the little things done to prevail.

And though it took just about all game Tuesday night for anyone other than Felix Hernandez and Dustin Ackley to come through, the Mariners did just enough late to pull out a 4-2 win in 10 innings over the Oakland Athletics.

There was a leadoff single after a tremendous at-bat in the 10th by Franklin Gutierrez, who stole second and scored the decisive run when Ichiro's takeout slide at second helped thwart an inning-ending double play.

Add on catcher Miguel Olivo throwing out three would-be base stealers, including Coco Crisp in the ninth after Seattle had already blown the lead, and the little things indeed kept the Mariners within 2 ½ games of the division lead.

"Typically, in that situation, you want to avoid the double play," Ichiro, speaking through interpreter Antony Suzuki, said of his takeout slide, which caused A's shortstop Cliff Pennington to throw the ball high and wide at first base. "So, I did what I thought was best to avoid the double play. That's what I had in mind."

Gutierrez scored the go-ahead run on the error and Brendan Ryan, who'd hit the grounder, wound up on second. Moments later, Adam Kennedy doubled him home and the Mariners were on their way to clinching a series win in front of 11,153 fans at the Coliseum.

Jamey Wright closed things out in the 10th for his first career save in his 500th appearance.

It looked initially like two runs would be enough to secure a Seattle victory for a second night in a row. Felix Hernandez pitched what manager Eric Wedge said was "as good as we've seen him all year long" and Ackley supplied the Mariners' entire offensive output through nine innings.

Ackley singled, stole second, took third on a throwing error and tagged up and barely beat a throw home on a sacrifice fly to left by Carlos Peguero in the third inning.

In the seventh, Ackley hit a solo homer to straightaway center off A's starter Trevor Cahill to make it 2-0 on a night Hernandez appeared in complete control.

Hernandez struck out 10 and didn't allow a runner to reach second other than David DeJesus with two outs in the fifth.

There were two outs in the eighth when Kurt Suzuki finally got Oakland on the board with a solo homer to left field, beginning an unlikely A's comeback.

Brandon League came on in relief in the ninth — Hernandez done after 122 pitches through eight — and yielded a leadoff double to Jemile Weeks, who was promptly bunted to third. Crisp then hit a soft blooper to shallow left with Seattle's infield playing in.

Peguero was the only guy with a shot at it, but appeared to hesitate before breaking for the ball. He tried to make a sliding catch, but the ball dropped in for a hit and the first earned run allowed by League in 20 appearances.

League and company weren't out of the woods yet with the speedy Crisp aboard. But Olivo bailed them out by nabbing Crisp at second to help Seattle survive another inning before Gutierrez and Ichiro came through.

"I told (Ichiro), 'Hey, way to play the game.' " Wedge said. "He went in there hard. He recognized that it was kind of a soft ground ball. He knew what they were going to try to do, went in there and was aggressive ... and that was a difference-maker for us."

Gutierrez had preceded that with what Wedge said had been his best at-bat of the season, then pulled off a huge, one-out steal of second after Greg Halman failed to bunt him over. The A's later walked Ichiro to bring up Ryan and the sequence that led to Seattle's go-ahead run.

Hernandez watched from the dugout, his shot at victory already gone on a night in which all his pitches had worked to perfection. But Hernandez could only think of his good friend Gutierrez — batting just .183 coming in and hitless on the night to that point — needing to get around to score.

"It was good for him right there because he needs more confidence," Hernandez said. "And we need Guti. We need Guti to be flying around. If he keeps doing what he did on the bases that last inning, it's going to be good."

It already was good. And a Mariners team struggling to score in the best of times needs plenty more big things out of little plays.

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Originally published July 5, 2011 at 9:23 PM | Page modified July 5, 2011 at 10:56 PM

M's ponder how to juggle Michael Pineda's starts | Mariners Notebook

By Geoff Baker

Seattle Times staff reporter

OAKLAND, Calif. — Michael Pineda could skip a key series against the Texas Rangers after the All-Star break, depending on what he does during his days off.

It's still possible the rookie right-hander could be added to the American League squad because Felix Hernandez will pitch Sunday for Seattle and thus be ineligible to participate in Tuesday's Midsummer Classic in Phoenix.

If Pineda replaces Hernandez and pitches in the All-Star Game, the Mariners are considering skipping him in the Texas series and using him instead during an ensuing trip to Toronto.

There is an off-day between the series against the Rangers July 14-17 at Safeco Field, and the one in Toronto July 19-21, which would allow the team to delay Pineda's second-half debut even further.

An extended break between starts is one way the team could ease the 22-year-old's workload so he can continue pitching through September if his club stays in the race.

"Ultimately, we want to make sure we utilize that (All-Star) break as best we can for all five guys," Mariners manager Eric Wedge said about the team's rotation. "We haven't made any final decisions with that, but we have an idea."

One downside to pushing Pineda back would occur if he travels to Phoenix but doesn't pitch in the All-Star Game. If that happens, it would be at least a 10-day break between live outings for him.

"Here's the fine line," Wedge said. "You want to give him some extra time. But you don't want to give him too much extra time. You want him to stay in sync. You don't want him to get too far removed from that. So, that's what we're trying to balance."

Notes

- Pineda on Monday became the first Mariners rookie to notch 100 strikeouts before the break. The next closest is Mark Langston, who fanned 84 before the All-Star Game during his rookie season, 1984. Pineda is only the fourth rookie pitcher in the majors to accomplish the feat in the last 10 seasons.
- Left-hander Erik Bedard joined the team in Oakland and is to start throwing again soon, so he'll be ready to be activated off the disabled list following the break. Wedge tentatively has Bedard scheduled to pitch the third or fourth game of the series against the Rangers.
- Catcher Miguel Olivo played his first game in a week on Tuesday after sitting out with a sore hamstring. Wedge wouldn't comment on the team's plans regarding third catcher Jose Yopez, saying he wanted to see how Olivo got through Tuesday's game.

Yopez, 30, hasn't played since being promoted from AAA Tacoma last week after backup catcher Chris Gimenez and Olivo got hurt in the same game. Gimenez is now on the 60-day disabled list and Josh Bard has assumed primary backup duties.

- Seattle's bullpen entered Tuesday having not allowed a run over 16 innings dating to June 24. The relief corps had limited opponents to a .158 batting average with 13 strikeouts and three walks during that stretch.

Next five

Wednesday @ Oakland, 12:35 p.m., ROOT | Vargas (6-5, 3.57) vs. Moscoso (2-4, 2.51)

Thursday @ L.A. Angels, 7:10 p.m., ROOT | Fister (3-9, 3.02) vs. Weaver (10-4, 1.92)

Friday @ L.A. Angels, 7:10 p.m., ROOT | Beavan (1-0, 1.29) vs. Santana (4-8, 3.89)

Saturday @ L.A. Angels, 6:05 p.m., ROOT | Pineda (8-5, 2.58) vs. Pineiro (4-3, 3.90)

Sunday @ L.A. Angels, 12:35 p.m., ROOT | Hernandez (8-7, 3.22) vs. Haren (9-5, 2.65)

For the record: W-L 43-43; W PCT .500; Streak: W3 Home: 23-22 Road: 20-21 vs. AL West: 11-9 vs. L.A.: 3-2 vs. Oakland: 6-3 vs. Texas: 2-4 vs. AL East: 11-8 v. AL Cent: 12-17 vs. NL: 9-9 vs. LHP: 8-14 vs. RHP: 35-29 Day: 11-14 Night: 32-29 One-run: 16-15 Extra inngs.: 5-3

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Olivo returns; Mariners now heavy on catchers

OAKLAND – What the Seattle Mariners will do with an opening on their 25-man roster when they send rookie catcher Jose Yopez back to Tacoma remained a mystery Tuesday – one they don't seem in any rush to solve.

Miguel Olivo, who missed six games with a strained thigh muscle, returned to the lineup, but the team kept three catchers active.

There won't be a need for Olivo, Josh Bard and Yopez once they know Olivo is healthy. What then?

“Let's get Miguel through this first game and then go from there,” manager Eric Wedge said.

There's no rush – the Mariners don't have an obvious need they can fill with a call-up. They have a solid bullpen, and Erik Bedard is projected to return the week after the All-Star break, which begins Sunday.

They can't bring Mike Carp back yet – he hasn't been in Tacoma long enough after being sent down last week. There are plenty of Rainiers who can play third base: Matt Mangini, Alex Liddi and Kyle Seegar, for instance.

If the Mariners brought any of those players up, Adam Kennedy would lose playing time and Chone Figgins – in the second year of a four-year deal – would go to No. 3 on the depth chart.

With no obvious move to be made, the Mariners are in position to surprise with whatever they do.

REHABBING PITCHERS

David Aardsma threw off a mound Tuesday – 35 pitches in the bullpen, about half of those from midway up the mound – and fellow reliever Shawn Kelley played catch on flat ground.

Aardsma will likely begin a rehabilitation assignment in the minors within a week of the All-Star break, testing his right elbow strain.

Kelley, still working his way back from “partial” Tommy John surgery on his right elbow, threw hard and will be on the bullpen mound by the end of the week.

“There's a huge difference in the stress on your arm when you throw on flat ground, then on the mound,” Kelley said. “When you throw on a downhill plane, there's a lot more required, and if you're not 100 percent, you know it.”

The Mariners are optimistic about both men, but the reality is neither may pitch for Seattle this season.

ROE CLEARS WAIVERS

Chaz Roe, the right-hander obtained from Colorado in the Jose Lopez trade last winter, cleared waivers Tuesday and was outrighted to the Tacoma Rainiers.

Roe, 24, has made 10 starts and nine relief appearances with the Rainiers this season, going 0-5 with one save and a 6.41 earned run average. He was taken off Seattle's 40-man roster last week to make room for Yopez.

M'S SIGN 4 DRAFTEES

The Mariners signed four more of their 51 draft picks, including outfielder James Zamarripa, taken in the sixth round, and now have 31 of their draftees under contract.

Along with Zamarripa, the team announced the signings of left-handed pitcher Nick Valenza (18th round), right-handed pitcher Richard White (23rd round) and right-handed pitcher Gabe Saquilon (25th round).

All four players will be assigned to the rookie-level Peoria Mariners in the Arizona Summer League.

The M's first-round pick, lefty Danny Hultzen, remains unsigned.

ON TAP

Seattle plays at Oakland, a 12:35 p.m. game that will be televised on Root Sports. Probable starting pitchers: Jason Vargas (6-5, 3.57) vs. Guillermo Moscoso (2-4, 2.51).

Fister not 1st in tough-luck club

JOHN MCGRATH; STAFF WRITER

Published: 07/06/11 12:05 am

The Tacoma News Tribune

Later this month, Bert Blyleven's long and frustrating wait for induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame will conclude with an acceptance speech at Cooperstown, N.Y.

Blyleven spent 13 years in ballot limbo before mustering the support of 75 percent of the voters. In 2010, mirroring the hard-luck results of his pitching career, Blyleven finished with 74.2 percent.

Sorry, Bert. This ain't horseshoes.

The right-handed curveball master would have scored a Hall pass much sooner were it not for a mind-boggling tendency to pitch on nights his teammates' bats were missing. Between 1971 and '78, Blyleven's season average was 278 innings pitched, 222 strikeouts, a 2.79 ERA – and 14 losses.

Ten times during Blyleven's career, he was beaten in a 1-0 decision.

Any kind of offensive support in those 10 games would have pushed his lifetime record to the cusp of the 300-victory club, a distinction worth first-ballot consideration.

Instead, his career record was 287-250 – very good but, in the eyes of some keep-the-Hall-small voters, just not good enough for Cooperstown enshrinement.

I've been thinking about Blyleven a lot this season. I think about him, it seems, every fifth day of the Mariners schedule, when Doug Fister takes his turn in the rotation.

Fister's record fell to 3-9 last Saturday night, thanks to the phantom ball-four pitch the Padres converted into the only run in a 1-0 defeat. Fister has made three consecutive starts in which he's worked at least eight innings while giving up one earned run, and yet he hasn't won since May 30.

Fister didn't whine after the lost-count debacle. All business both on the field and off, he's not the type to talk the talk after walking the walk that wasn't a walk. But, still, you could imagine him driving home, opening the

front door, shutting the windows and drawing the shades before removing every breakable item from the kitchen cabinet and hurling it against the wall.

Then again, there's this consoling reality: He's not the first pitcher to encounter tough luck.

The late Pirates left-hander Harvey Haddix, facing a fearsome Braves lineup in 1959, threw what might have been the greatest game ever pitched – 12 perfect innings, 36 up and 36 down – before an infield error put a man on in the 13th. A sacrifice bunt set up an intentional walk, and when Joe Adcock hit Haddix's final pitch over the fence, the game was lost.

At least Haddix was credited for pitching a nine-inning no-hitter – until 1991, when baseball's "Committee for Statistical Accuracy" ruled that a no-hit performance must be a victorious performance.

Pitching: It's a hard-knock life.

When the Blue Jays' Jo-Jo Reyes beat the Indians on May 30, it didn't garner much notice outside Toronto and Cleveland. But Reyes' performance was monumental for its history-book implications. He hadn't won a decision as a starting pitcher since June 13, 2008, which is to say: Reyes made 28 straight starts without a victory, sharing a record held by two others.

Challenged to avoid the dubious achievement of a 29-game winless streak, Reyes, buoyed by Jays fans chanting his name throughout the ninth inning, put an exclamation point on his effort by throwing a complete game.

A Toronto newspaper invited Reyes to share his thoughts on winning for the first time in almost three years. As it turned out, the snake-bitten starter had plenty of thoughts, which he summed up with five keys to success.

The No. 1 key? Have fun.

"I've said many times that my teammates are awesome, and it's true," Reyes wrote. "Sports are supposed to be fun, and we have some good laughs. ... Smiling is not a sign of weakness. Even when others think things look bleak, whether it's at work or at school, a sense of humor can be valuable."

Chances are slim that Reyes will join Blyleven in the Hall of Fame, but in the Hall of Major Leaguers Who Get It, he's in the front row.

Blyleven got it, too.

Talking about his tough-luck career last summer with the San Francisco Chronicle, Blyleven said: "You try to keep your team close and give them a chance in the seventh, eighth or ninth to win. Nobody liked to lose one game. I lost 250, but a lot were close. When I lost, it made me run more and train harder. I think it made me stay in the game longer."

Blyleven stayed in the game long enough to win two World Series rings (Pirates, 1979; Twins, 1987), and secure a top-5 spot on the lifetime strikeout list, and gain admission into the Hall of Fame. If every defeat compelled Blyleven to run more and train harder, I suspect those 10 decisions in 1-0 games turned him into a workout zombie.

When Fister was charged with that bizarre defeat on Saturday, by the way, it was the first time he's lost a big-league game by a 1-0 score.

You can't win 'em all as a starting pitcher. You can go three years without winning a single game, and you can produce 12 innings of perfection without receiving credit for a no-hitter.

It's a hard-knock life, but there's a secret to surviving the hard-knock life.

Have fun.

Seattle slides past Oakland in 10th

LARRY LARUE; Staff writer

Published: 07/06/11 12:05 am

The Tacoma News Tribune

OAKLAND – Felix Hernandez pitched eight marvelous innings and got no decision. Brandon League tried to save a one-run lead in the ninth and saw a pop fly over a drawn-in infield tie the game.

Rarities, yes – but the Seattle Mariners beat the Oakland Athletics, 4-2 in 10 innings, on something even stranger.

Ichiro Suzuki, a non-All-Star for the first time in his 11-year career, took out Athletics shortstop Chad Pennington in the 10th and, instead of an inning-ending double play, Pennington threw wild to first.

And Franklin Gutierrez scored the tie-breaking run.

“That play was the difference-maker, and Ichiro went in hard, aggressive, and broke that play up,” manager Eric Wedge said. “I told him afterward, ‘Way to play the game!’ That’s what we want to do here.”

Ichiro has won games with his arm, his glove, his bat and his speed in Seattle, but breaking up double plays with aggressive slides? Not the most often-used arrow in his quiver.

With Gutierrez at second base and one out, Brendan Ryan hit a slow grounder to second baseman Jemile Weeks.

“When I saw the ball hit, I had an image of breaking up the double play,” Ichiro said through his interpreter. “That was all I had in mind.”

By inning's end, Seattle had tacked on a second run when Adam Kennedy blooped an opposite-field double to score Ryan, who was on second because of the throwing error.

That the win went to League instead of Felix was one of those baseball-isn't-fair moments.

“That’s as good as I’ve seen Felix this season, and that’s saying a lot,” Wedge said. “He had fantastic command, and everything was working.”

Hernandez struck out 10 batters in eight innings – the 14th time in his career he'd done so and the fifth time this season – and allowed five hits, including a home run to Kurt Suzuki.

What stopped him from pitching the ninth? Too many pitches, 122 of them.

League came in to close and gave up a leadoff ground-rule double and a sacrifice bunt. Wedge had the Mariners infield playing in, and Coco Crisp hit a little popup just beyond the infield.

Rookie Carlos Peguero charged, slid and had the ball bang off his glove: RBI single.

The Athletics had the momentum, and Crisp tried to push it, attempting to steal second base ... and Miguel Olivo threw him out.

Olivo's return to the lineup as catcher after missing six games was a mixed blessing for Seattle. He threw out three Oakland baserunners – Melvin had the Athletics running at every opportunity.

“I don't know that they were testing him,” Wedge said, “but if they were, he passed.”

At the plate, however, he was overanxious, and it showed.

Olivo was 0-for-3 when he came to bat in the ninth inning, his team leading 2-1, with runners at first and second base and one out. Right-handed reliever Joey Devine didn't throw a strike to Olivo and didn't have to.

On three pitches well wide of the zone, Olivo flailed and missed.

Tough night at the plate, good one behind it.

When the game went into extra innings, veteran Jamey Wright came in to pitch, appearing in the 500th game of his career. It produced his first save.

“Until now, I only had blown saves,” deadpanned Wright. “I asked League if he set it up this way, so I could get a save in my 500th game.”

While Wright was in his 500th game, rookie Dustin Ackley was in his 15th – and had an impact.

Ackley singled and scored in the second inning on a Peguero sacrifice fly, then hit his third home run in the seventh – a bolt to straightaway center field.

“I don't know if that's all I have, but it was enough,” Ackley said. “(Monday) I thought I took too many good pitches. Tonight I wanted to come out more aggressive.”

Ackley is batting .300 with six extra-base hits, nine runs scored and eight driven in.

The victory got Seattle back to .500 (43-43) with one game left to play in Oakland, then four in Anaheim, Calif., against the Angels before the All-Star break.

“We're in a good position now, especially with our pitching,” Ackley said. “If we score some runs, they're going to win a lot of games.”

Especially if they can get a few hitters – like Ichiro – going again.

The right-fielder had a pair of hits in this one and is now at .277, up nine points from Sunday. He stole his 22nd base in the sixth inning and was stranded when both Kennedy and Justin Smoak struck out, but he put himself in scoring position.

All that he's done before, many times. Taking out a shortstop to break up a double play, force an error, win a game?

“I’ve only been here this season, but that’s the first time I’ve seen him do it,” Wedge said. “He picked a great time to do it, too.”

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From laughter to thriller

MIKE CURTO; Contributing writer

Published: 07/06/11 12:05 am

The Tacoma News Tribune

COLORADO SPRINGS, Col. – Tacoma closer Josh Lueke was selected as the Rainiers’ lone representative in the Triple-A All-Star Game, and he showed exactly why while nailing down a difficult save in the Rainiers’ 13-9 win Tuesday night.

Tacoma nearly blew an 11-2 lead and was hanging on for life when Lueke entered the game in the bottom of the eighth inning.

The Sky Sox had rallied to score seven runs after there were two outs in the seventh, cutting the lead to 11-9.

Tacoma reliever Dan Cortes walked the bases loaded with nobody out in the eighth, and the Sky Sox had their 3-4-5 hitters due up.

That’s when manager Daren Brown decided to go to his All-Star.

Lueke got Mike Paulk to line out to shortstop Alex Liddi for the first out. He then struck out cleanup hitter Mike Jacobs before getting an inning-ending ground ball from Joe Mather.

The Sky Sox went from bases loaded, no outs to zero runs, inning over.

“I’ve got to give it to Liddi for the really nice line drive catch, which got the momentum off their back,” said Lueke. “I just tried to keep the ball in the bottom of the strike zone and not hang anything for them to hit.”

Tacoma tacked on a pair of insurance runs in the top of the ninth on a two-run single by catcher Ralph Henriquez, and Lueke set down the side in the bottom of the inning to earn his ninth save of the season.

The win went to Anthony Vasquez, who was making his Triple-A debut. Vasquez (1-0) allowed two runs through the first six innings. He had thrown 96 pitches, but with an 11-2 lead Brown decided to see if he could get through the seventh.

Vasquez ended up loading the bases with one out, and reliever Chris Seddon allowed all three inherited runners to score.

The 24-year-old left-hander ended up allowing five runs in 6 innings, on seven hits and three walks.

“The line score is not indicative of how well Vasquez threw,” said Brown. “He mixed speeds, used both sides of the plate, up and down, located everything. That was nice to see.”

Tacoma (42-44) has won nine of its last 12 games.

Short hops: Kyle Seager and Luis Jimenez homered for Tacoma during a five-run second inning. ... Ryan Langerhans singled in the third inning, extending his hitting streak to 19 games.

On tap: The three-game series in Colorado Springs concludes with a game at 6:05 PDT tonight. Tacoma starts left-hander Nate Robertson (2-2, 4.68) against right-hander Clayton Mortensen (0-2, 13.50). The game will be broadcast on 850 AM and streamed on www.tacomarainiers.com.

Mike Curto is the Rainiers' radio announcer.

Mariners win in extras to climb back to .500

By Greg Johns / MLB.com | 7/6/2011 2:30 AM ET

OAKLAND -- The Mariners got what Felix Hernandez said was his best pitching performance of the year on Tuesday. But it took a two-run rally in the 10th inning to beat the A's 4-2 at Oakland Coliseum, as Seattle pulled back to .500 for the season.

Franklin Gutierrez scored the go-ahead run on a throwing error by A's shortstop Cliff Pennington in the top of the 10th, after All-Star closer Brandon League suffered his first blown save since mid-May in the bottom of the ninth to cost Hernandez a victory.

Instead, League wound up picking up the victory, as Seattle scored twice off Andrew Bailey, with Mariners veteran Jamey Wright getting his first Major League save in his 500th appearance.

"Funny how it worked out," said Wright. "I've never been in that situation before. It was pretty cool. I'd rather have not pitched tonight. 'Leaguer' has been solid for us. I asked him if he planned it that way so I could get my first save in my 500th game. I'm just glad our team won. It was a good win for us."

Gutierrez singled to lead off the 10th -- snapping an 0-for-15 streak -- and stole second. After an intentional walk to Ichiro Suzuki, shortstop Brendan Ryan hit a potential double-play grounder, but Pennington threw wildly to first as Ichiro slid hard at his feet.

Manager Eric Wedge credited Ichiro's aggressive slide as being "a difference maker," though Pennington said he just made a bad throw.

"I just didn't get a grip on the ball," said Pennington. "I tried not to throw it, and threw it away."

Adam Kennedy followed with a run-scoring double to give Wright a two-run cushion, and he set down the A's in order.

"I'd had nothing but blown saves up to this point, so it's nice to get one in the fun category," said Wright, who spent about half his 16-year career as a starter. "It's something I've always wanted an opportunity to do, even if it's just that once. I felt great out there, did exactly what I wanted to do. It was a good feeling."

Hernandez, needing just a little help in pursuit of his ninth win, got two runs to work with, courtesy of rookie second baseman Dustin Ackley. But League couldn't seal the deal for the first time in his past 15 save opportunities, as the A's rallied to tie the game in the bottom of the ninth.

Hernandez followed up on his All-Star selection with a dominating performance, allowing just one run on four hits and no walks over eight innings, while striking out 10. But his record remains at 8-7 with a 3.22 ERA.

"Felix was as good as we've seen him all year long tonight, and that's saying a lot," said Wedge.

He got no argument there from "The King," who recorded his fifth double-digit strikeout game of the year, and 14th of his career.

"Yeah, that's right," said Hernandez. "I had command of all my pitches and was finding the strike zone. That's me, right there. That's what I have to do, just throw strikes. I felt like I had everything, and that's the way I need to pitch, be consistent like that."

League, who leads the American League with 23 saves, gave up a run for the first time in 21 outings on a bloop single to left that scored Jemile Weeks from third. Weeks led off the ninth with a double, was sacrificed to third and raced home after Coco Crisp's looper to left fell just in front of a sliding Carlos Peguero.

Ackley, just over two weeks into his Major League career, ripped his third home run and scored the first two runs for Seattle.

The 23-year-old Ackley drove a Trevor Cahill changeup over the center-field fence in the top of the seventh inning to give Hernandez a 2-0 cushion and open the eyes of his skipper.

"He backspinned that ball 410 feet to dead [center]," said Wedge. "You talk about putting a good swing on the baseball, squaring it up and staying through it. A lot of things have to happen to backspin the ball to dead center like that. You're not going to do much better than that."

Ackley said he got a changeup up in the zone from Cahill, who gave up just five hits in a strong seven-inning outing of his own -- a rematch of the season's Opening Day starters.

"I hit it pretty good," said Ackley. "I don't know if that's everything I've got, but I got it good enough. I saw it well. After yesterday, I took a lot of good pitches that I could have hit. Today, I was telling myself to be more aggressive. I put a good swing on that one."

Ackley used his speed to get the Mariners on the board earlier against Cahill in the second. The youngster singled to left, moved to third on a stolen base and overthrow by Kurt Suzuki, and then motored home on a sacrifice fly to short left field by fellow-rookie Peguero.

Greg Johns is a reporter for MLB.com. Follow him on Twitter @GregJohnsMLB as well as his Mariners Musings blog. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

League awaits call ... from home

By Greg Johns / MLB.com | 07/06/11 3:45 PM ET

OAKLAND -- Mariners closer Brandon League has a lot on his mind, and not all of it involves baseball -- even while he continues racking up the most saves in the American League.

League picked up his 23rd save in Monday's 2-1 victory over the A's. It was his 20th straight appearance without allowing an earned run, a stretch that was snapped on Tuesday.

The 20 straight scoreless appearances ties League for the sixth-longest stretch in club history, and his 23 saves are the third-most by a Mariners reliever prior to the All-Star break.

But the call League is waiting on is from his wife, Sasha, who remains in Seattle awaiting the birth of the couple's third child. Sasha is due any day, and went to the hospital on Friday night with Brandon thinking the moment had arrived, though it turned out to be false labor.

So League reluctantly headed out on the road with the team on Sunday night on the seven-game trek to Oakland and Anaheim.

"It's tough, because -- at home after the game -- I get to see them and I'm right there if anything happens," League said. "Even if it's during the game, I'm in the same facility. But on the road, it's tough. It's definitely on my mind until I cross the line."

He appears to be doing a good job with that, given his latest outing on Monday when he shut down the heart of the A's order in the ninth inning, striking out Hideki Matsui and Chris Carter after a one-out walk to Coco Crisp.

"I'm trying," League said with a smile.

League has been there for the birth of his first two kids, both of whom were born during the season.

"The first one, we were just leaving on a road trip, so I stayed back in Toronto," he said. "The second one, I was rehabbing in '07, so I was home. This is definitely a new experience."

Then again, this whole year has been a new experience for the 28-year-old reliever. For the first time in his career, he's filling the closer's role, and he's handled that remarkably well -- outside of a mid-May bump when he lost four straight games.

Since then, he hasn't allowed an earned run.

"I feel good," League said. "I'm still working on stuff every day. There's always stuff to work on. You can call it a roll or streak or whatever, but you still have to come to the field the next day [and treat it] as a new day."

Most satisfying for League has been his ability to support a starting staff that has been so impressive all year. His primary goal is to get wins for the rotation, which has been phenomenal in pushing games into the seventh inning and beyond all season.

"It feels even better to help them get the win they deserve," he said. "The ideal line for a bullpen guy is 0-0 all year. All those games into the seventh inning just shows everybody how good our starters are. No. 1, we've got a six-man bullpen. And on top of that, some days we're not even pitching."

Greg Johns is a reporter for MLB.com. Follow him on Twitter @GregJohnsMLB as well as his Mariners Musings blog. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

Olivo returns to lineup

By Greg Johns / MLB.com | 07/06/11 3:45 PM ET

OAKLAND -- Miguel Olivo was back behind the plate on Tuesday for the Mariners, after sitting out the past five games with a sore right hamstring.

Olivo, 32, did some running before Monday's game, and passed all the necessary tests for trainer Rick Griffin. Manager Eric Wedge has been careful with the veteran, knowing how troublesome hamstrings can be if they become strained or torn.

But Olivo has been champing at the bit -- and finally got the call on Tuesday against the A's, after Josh Bard had started the previous five games since getting called up from Triple-A Tacoma.

Jose Yopez, a 30-year-old who has never played in a Major League game, remained with the team on Tuesday after also getting called up from Tacoma on Wednesday when backup Chris Gimenez went on the disabled list with a strained oblique muscle.

Yepez likely will be sent back down once it's clear that Olivo is OK, which will open up a spot on the 25-man roster. Left fielder/designated hitter Mike Carp was sent down to Tacoma on Sunday when pitcher Blake Beavan was added, but Carp can't be recalled for a 10-day period -- unless it's to fill an injury-created opening.

Wedge declined to speculate on Yepez's situation prior to Tuesday's game.

"Let's get Miggy through tonight, first," Wedge said. "Miggy is ready to play. Of course, if you ask him, he's been ready to play for a week, now. But he's tested out good, so we've got him back in there tonight, and we'll go from there."

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Bedard expected to return vs. Rangers

By Greg Johns / MLB.com | 07/06/11 3:45 PM ET

OAKLAND -- Mariners manager Eric Wedge isn't ready to announce his rotation following the All-Star Game next week, but said on Tuesday the plan, right now, is for injured left-hander Erik Bedard to return somewhere in the four-game home series against Texas immediately following the break.

Bedard, on the 15-day disabled list with a sprained left knee, is on the current seven-day road trip to Oakland and Anaheim. He's yet to throw on the side, but is expected to do so in the coming days, with the idea of pointing toward a return when his DL stint ends on July 13.

"As of right now, that's what we're shooting for," Wedge said.

The skipper declined to outline the full plan for the rotation, however. Things could change slightly if Michael Pineda is named to the All-Star team as a replacement, which would happen this Sunday after any All-Star selections throw a pitch in a game that day.

At that point, they become ineligible to pitch in the All-Star Game on Tuesday, a situation that will happen with three AL pitchers, including Felix Hernandez.

Hernandez, thus, won't be allowed to throw in the All-Star Game, and would be on schedule to start on Friday against the Rangers, if the Mariners keep him on his every-fifth-day slate. But Wedge wasn't dropping any hints on Tuesday.

"It's still tentative," he said. "Right now, our entire focus is [on] the break. We've mapped some things out all the way through, as we manage Pineda and some of these other guys. Carl [Willis] and I have mapped it out if it goes this way or that way. But ultimately, we want to utilize that break the best way we can for all five guys. We haven't made any final decisions, but we have an idea."

Among the conversations has been pushing Pineda back to give the 22-year-old extra time for a midseason rest.

"We've talked about everything," Wedge said. "Here's the fine line. You want to give him some extra time, but you don't want to give him too much extra time. You want him to stay in sync, and not get too far removed from that. That's what we're talking about."

After the Mariners' four-game series with Texas, they have a day off before opening a nine-day road trip. Thus, whatever starter doesn't throw against the Rangers will have to wait until July 19 for their next start. If the

Mariners target Pineda for that game -- a likely scenario -- then the youngster will have a nine-day break between his start on Saturday and his next outing.

Worth noting

- Right-handed pitcher Chaz Roe cleared waivers on Tuesday and was outrighted to Triple-A Tacoma. Roe, 24, was designated for assignment on Wednesday to make room on the 40-man roster for catcher Jose Yopez.

Roe, who was acquired from the Rockies last December in exchange for Jose Lopez, is 0-5 with a 6.41 ERA in 18 appearances for the Rainiers. Since moving to the bullpen on June 2, Roe has a 3.45 ERA and one save in 15 2/3 innings.

- Pineda became the first Mariners rookie with 100 strikeouts before the All-Star break, when he notched seven more K's in Monday's 2-1 win over the A's to give him 106, with one more start on Saturday. Mark Langston held the previous franchise record, when he struck out 84 batters before the break in his rookie season in 1984.

- Pineda is just the fourth rookie in the Majors over the past 10 years to hit 100 strikeouts before the All-Star break, joining Daisuke Matsuzaka (123 in '07), Francisco Liriano (102 in '06) and Kazuhisa Ishii (100 in '02).

- Mariners starters lead the AL with a 3.10 ERA going into Tuesday's game, well under the club record of 3.67 set in 1990.

- The Mariners signed four more of their Draft picks: outfielder James Zamarripa (sixth round), left-handed pitcher Nick Valenza (18th), right-handed pitcher Richard White (23rd) and right-handed pitcher Gabe Saquilon (25th). All four were assigned to the rookie-level Peoria Mariners in the Arizona Summer League.

The club has now signed 31 of its 51 Draft picks.

Greg Johns is a reporter for MLB.com. Follow him on Twitter @GregJohnsMLB as well as his Mariners Musings blog. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

Unlikely pitchers' duel set for series finale

By Doug Miller / MLB.com | 7/6/2011 2:15 AM ET

It might be an unlikely pitchers' duel, but when Seattle's Jason Vargas takes the hill against the A's Guillermo Moscoso on Wednesday at Oakland Coliseum, fans will be watching two of the better starters of late in the American League West.

Vargas has pitched three shutouts in his last six starts. He blanked San Diego on six hits in his last outing.

"I can't say I've had a better stretch," Vargas said. "I've felt good like this before, but never was able to string it together in such a short period of time."

Mariners manager Eric Wedge said it's all about command, because Vargas already has his approach down pat.

"When he's throwing the ball where he wants to, he's tough," Wedge said. "He repeats his delivery so well. He's very consistent with his arm action, and he knows how to pitch."

Meanwhile, Moscoso has been a very pleasant surprise for Oakland. But will it last?

The righty joined the rotation in May after Tyson Ross sustained a left oblique strain. But with Ross' return on the horizon (he made his second rehab outing for Triple-A Sacramento on Tuesday), Moscoso's future in the rotation remains uncertain.

But in nine outings (seven starts) this season, Moscoso has amassed a 2.51 ERA -- despite a 2-4 record.

"He has a game to pitch, and we'll see where it goes from there," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "He's been really good for us. Look at his ERA, and look at his batting average against. He's kept us in every game."

Mariners: Gutierrez looking for a groove

Franklin Gutierrez was back in center field on Tuesday after getting a day off. The Gold Glove center fielder has been struggling to find his offensive rhythm (hitting .184), and Wedge said it's time for him to get going. Wedge said Gutierrez is fine physically now, after missing the first six weeks of the season with a stomach issue.

"That's a part of it, no doubt," Wedge said. "But I think we're beyond that now. ... There's certain things he needs to do to get himself in better position to hit the baseball, and it's time for him to start doing it, because we need him."

- Reliever Jamey Wright earned his first Major League save with a perfect inning in Tuesday night's win. It also was the 500th appearance of his career. The veteran right-hander has made 246 starts and 254 relief appearances in 16 seasons in the Majors.

- Second baseman Dustin Ackley is batting .300 (15-for-50) with three homers and five walks in his first 15 big league games, and is 7-for-10 (.700) vs. left-handed pitchers.

A's: Pitching dominating again

The A's pitching staff has compiled a 1.95 ERA (37 earned runs in 170 1/3 innings) over the last 19 games, after going 0-11 with a 7.30 ERA, .312 opponents batting average, 41 walks, 37 strikeouts and 14 home runs over the previous 14 games.

- The A's have hit just 46 home runs, which is the fewest in the Majors. They are on pace to hit 86 home runs, and the Oakland record for fewest home runs in a season is 94 in 1968. The A's have hit two home runs or fewer in each of the last 58 games.

Worth noting

- Forty-seven of the Mariners' 86 games have been decided by two or fewer runs. Seattle is 16-16 in one-run games, and 7-8 in two-run decisions.

- A's designated hitter Hideki Matsui has 499 career home runs between Japan and the United States. Twenty-five Major Leaguers and eight players in the Japanese Leagues have hit 500.

A's rally in 9th before falling to Mariners in 10

Published 11:06 p.m., Tuesday, July 5, 2011

The Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — Everything was going according to plan. The Athletics finally got All-Star Felix Hernandez out of the game after eight brilliant innings and managed to tie the game against Seattle's closer.

The defense let Oakland down, though, and a throwing error led to one more missed opportunity.

Franklin Gutierrez scored the go-ahead run on a throwing error by A's shortstop Cliff Pennington in the 10th inning and the Mariners held on to beat Oakland 4-2 on Tuesday night.

"He tried to stop the throw," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "It was nothing Ichiro (Suzuki) did. When it came out of his glove, he knew he didn't have a grip and it sneaks out of his hand."

Gutierrez singled off A's closer Andrew Bailey (0-1) leading off the inning and stole second with one out. After Suzuki walked, Brendan Ryan then hit a soft grounder to second baseman Jemile Weeks, who flipped the ball to Pennington for the force at second before Pennington's relay sailed wide left of first.

"I tried not to throw it and I threw it away," Pennington said. "We just can't do that. We have to play defense behind our guys in order to win ballgames."

The A's have one of the top pitching staffs in the majors and they also have one of worst fielding teams, too. With two errors resulting in two unearned runs, the A's have allowed 47 unearned runs, matching Texas for most in the majors. Their 68 total miscues are second in the AL.

"In close games defense comes up big," Melvin said. "Errors can typically cost you games."

A's starter Trevor Cahill all but matched Hernandez, allowing two runs — one earned — on five hits over seven innings. He walked one and struck out five. He was betrayed by the fielding mistakes.

"It's my job to keep the other team from scoring," Cahill said. "I just have to be sharp."

Adam Kennedy followed with an RBI double to make a winner of Brandon League (1-4), who blew his first save in 15 opportunities.

Kurt Suzuki homered for the A's, who have lost nine of 13 since a season-best six-game winning streak.

Dustin Ackley singled and scored an unearned run in the second then homered against Cahill leading off the seventh, helping the Mariners to their third straight win.

Jamey Wright earned his first career save in his 500th career appearance.

Weeks led off the ninth with a ground-rule double and was sacrificed to third. Coco Crisp then hit a short fly to left but Carlos Peguero couldn't get to it, allowing Weeks to score the tying run. It was the first run allowed by Seattle's bullpen since June 24 and League's first in 21 innings.

Before that, the A's didn't get much at all against Hernandez, who struck out 10 over eight innings. It's the fifth time this season and 14th in his career that Hernandez has reached double digits in strikeouts.

Seattle's ace, who dominated Oakland with a complete game on opening day, did not walk a batter and only allowed an eighth-inning solo home run to Suzuki while lowering his ERA to 1.09 against the A's this season.

Bailey (0-1) took the loss after giving up both runs in the 10th.

NOTES: Cahill has a 1.53 ERA in three starts against the Mariners this season. ... Melvin said there's a good chance OF Josh Willingham will accompany the team on its upcoming road trip and is cautiously optimistic that the injured veteran will return to Oakland's lineup before the All-Star break. Willingham, who recently completed a two-game rehab assignment with Triple-A Sacramento, has been on the disabled list since June 18. ... Weeks, Oakland's rookie second baseman, was named co-winner of the AL rookie of the month after batting

.309 with seven doubles, three triples and six RBIs in June. ... LHP Gio Gonzalez, the A's only All-Star this year, joined Toronto's Jose Bautista in being named AL co-players of the week. Gonzalez went 2-0 with a 0.60 ERA in two starts last week.

Mariners nip A's in 10

Updated 11:04 p.m., Tuesday, July 5, 2011

The Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — After 16 years in the big leagues, Jamey Wright finally has his first save — with some unintended help from teammate Brandon League.

The veteran starter-turned-reliever, who has pitched sparingly over the last six weeks, bailed out League and the Mariners with a perfect 10th inning, helping preserve Seattle's 4-2 win over the Oakland Athletics on Tuesday night.

"It's something I've always wanted an opportunity to get to do," said the 36-year-old right-hander. "I felt great out there and did exactly what I wanted to do. I've never been in that situation before. It was pretty cool."

Wright's achievement came after League, the AL leader in saves and one of two Seattle All-Stars this year, blew his fourth save of the season in the ninth inning and nearly wasted an outstanding outing by ace Felix Hernandez.

League gave up an game-tying RBI single to Coco Crisp with one out but avoided the loss when the Mariners scored twice in the 10th off Oakland closer Andrew Bailey.

Franklin Gutierrez scored the go-ahead run on a throwing error by A's shortstop Cliff Pennington and Adam Kennedy doubled in Brendan Ryan, helping Seattle to its third straight win and sixth in nine games against Oakland this season.

"I love the way our kids came back after they tied it up," Mariners manager Eric Wedge said. "League did a good job of keeping it tied and Gutierrez had his best at-bat of the year, and that's something that's something that should get him going."

Gutierrez singled off Bailey (0-1) leading off the 10th and stole second with one out. Ryan then hit a soft grounder to second baseman Jemile Weeks, who flipped the ball to Pennington for the force at second before Pennington's relay sailed wide left of first base.

"I didn't get a grip on the ball," Pennington said. "I tried not to throw it but I threw it away. We just can't do that. We have to play defense behind our guys to win ballgames."

Kennedy followed with his RBI double to make a winner of League (1-4), then Wright pitched a 1-2-3 ninth for his first save.

"Perseverance, that's the first word that comes to mind," Wright said. "You just work hard and good things happen. Bullpen innings have been tough to come by for the Seattle Mariners lately (because) our starters have been doing such a good job. I'm just glad that we won the game."

Kurt Suzuki homered for the A's, who couldn't muster much offense at all against Hernandez.

Hernandez allowed four hits and struck out 10 over eight innings. It's the fifth time this season and the 14th time in his career that Hernandez has reached double digits in strikeouts.

Seattle's ace, who dominated Oakland with a complete-game gem on opening day, did not walk a batter and gave up only an eighth inning solo home run to Kurt Suzuki while lowering his ERA to 1.09 against the A's this season.

"There are certain things you can do to try and beat a pitcher of that caliber when he's on, and he was certainly on," Oakland manager Bob Melvin said. "We tied the game (but) we weren't able to follow up."

Seattle's win came after League failed to hold a 2-1 lead.

Weeks led off the ninth with a ground-rule double and was sacrificed to third. Crisp then hit a short fly to left but Carlos Peguero bobbled the ball, allowing Weeks to score the tying run.

It was the first run allowed by Seattle's bullpen since June 24.

Before that, the Mariners were cruising behind Dustin Ackley.

Ackley singled and scored an unearned run in the second then homered against Oakland starter Trevor Cahill leading off the seventh.

Cahill allowed two runs with four strikeouts over seven innings and was on the hook for the loss until the A's bailed him out in the ninth.

Instead, Bailey took the loss after giving up both runs in the 10th.

NOTES: Cahill has a 1.53 ERA in three starts against the Mariners this season. ... Melvin said there's a good chance OF Josh Willingham will accompany the team on its upcoming road trip and is cautiously optimistic that the injured veteran will return to Oakland's lineup before the All-Star break. Willingham, who recently completed a two-game rehab assignment with Triple-A Sacramento, has been on the disabled list since June 18. ... Weeks, Oakland's rookie second baseman, was named co-winner of the American League rookie of the month after batting .309 with seven doubles, three triples and six RBIs in June. ... LHP Gio Gonzalez, the A's only All-Star this year, joined Toronto's Jose Bautista in being named AL co-players of the week. Gonzalez went 2-0 with a 0.60 ERA in two starts last week.

Published: Wednesday, July 6, 2011

AquaSox slammed by Salem-Keiser Volcanoes' grand slam in seventh puts game out of reach

By John Boyle, Everett Herald Writer

EVERETT -- So much for a pitchers duel.

For five-plus innings Tuesday night, Everett and Salem-Keiser were locked in a low-scoring affair as starting pitchers Jordan Shippers and Kendry Flores mowed down opposing hitters. But eventually the Volcanoes broke through in the sixth inning, then blew the game open in the seventh to hand the AquaSox a 7-2 loss in front of 1,193 at Everett Memorial Stadium.

"We had a rough inning," said AquaSox manager Scott Steinmann, referring to the seventh inning when Brett Krill's grand slam put the game out of reach.

The loss snaps a four-game winning streak for the Sox, who host Salem-Keizer again today before hitting the road for a five-game series in Boise. Conversely it was a rare victory for the Volcanoes, who had lost eight straight and 16 of their last 17.

The left-handed Shipers had impressive swing-and-miss stuff, striking out eight in six innings while walking just one. He finished allowing two earned runs and five hits.

"Today we established the fastball, threw it early in counts, late in counts, he was able to put guys away with it," said Everett catcher Mike Dowd. "His curveball looked good and he was mixing his pitches."

But after allowing just one run through five innings, Shipers got into a bit of trouble in the sixth. The Volcanoes got one run on a Krill double, then Krill scored on a error. Shipers struck out the final two batters he would face to end the inning, but the damage was done. Even so, it was an impressive outing for Shipers, who only turned 20 last week.

"He's getting better every time out," Steinmann said. "He's a young kid, and every time out he's getting better and better. I'm pleased with the way he performed tonight."

Whatever hope Everett had of coming back evaporated in the seventh when Krill hit a grand slam off of reliever Joe DiRocco to give Salem-Keizer a 7-1 lead.

"DiRocco, he's done a great job for us all season," Steinman said. "He's had one other bad inning but throughout the season he's done very well for us. We like bringing him in in that situation, and I'd bring him in that situation again. I trust him that much with the baseball."

Everett did get a run back in the bottom half of the seventh when right fielder James Wood crushed a home run to right field of reliever Aaron King. Wood's homer gave Everett its first base runner since the second inning after Flores had stymied the Sox for most of the evening.

And it's not like anyone should have seen this coming. Flores came into the game with an 0-2 record and 10.00 earned run average and looked like he might live down to expectations early when allowed a double on his first pitch of the game to Marcus Littlewood. The Sox shortstop eventually scored on a Danny Lopez sac fly, but Flores faced the minimum over the course of his six innings following the leadoff double. Following a leadoff single in the second, Flores retired the last 13 batters he would face, striking out four.

"He was throwing fastballs, pretty flat fastball early, then he just settled into a groove," Dowd. "He had a little bit of a cutter and a pretty good 12-6 curve that just threw guys off. He settled in there and we kind of let him off the hook."

Herald Writer John Boyle: jboyle@heraldnet.com.

Published: Wednesday, July 6, 2011

AquaSox notebook: Littlewood back in familiar spot

By John Boyle, Everett Herald Writer

By his own admission, Marcus Littlewood lacks the speed of a prototypical leadoff hitter, but the AquaSox shortstop feels right at home at the top of the order, which is where he was in the lineup Tuesday for the fifth time in six games.

Littlewood, a second-round pick in 2010, primarily hit second to start the season, but moved to the leadoff spot last week, which is where he hit in high school.

"I hit there in high school for four years, so I feel pretty comfortable at that position, being kind of the table setter for the team," he said. "I've always prided myself in trying to put together quality at bats, seeing a lot of pitches. I feel like I have pretty good plate discipline and that works well for the leadoff role."

That plate discipline is what led Everett manager Scott Steinmann to move Littlewood to the top of the lineup even though the 19-year-old doesn't fit the bill in terms of wheels.

"He's a guy who is working counts, he's seeing a lot of pitches, so in that spot he's going to be able to do that and help out the rest of the team," Steinmann said. "Since he's moved up there he's thrived a little bit, so we're probably going to leave him in there for a little while."

Heading into Tuesday night's game, the switch-hitting Littlewood had a .246 batting average. Since moving to the top of the lineup, he has gone 6-for-20 (.300) with three doubles, including a 3-for-5 day Monday. "I feel like I've been seeing the ball well all year, it's just making adjustments and I've made a couple recently that have helped me out," he said. As for the pressure that comes with being the highest draft pick -- by four rounds, no less -- on Everett's roster, Littlewood said that hasn't been an issue.

"I don't let it bother me," he said. "Nobody on this team cares where you're drafted. We're all here at the same level now trying to move up."

Melendres day-to-day Outfielder Nathan Melendres received good news Tuesday, a day after he had to come out of the game after being hit by a pitch in the wrist. Melendres wasn't in the lineup, but his absence shouldn't be a long one.

"He went and got X-ray and that was negative, so right now he's day-to-day," Steinmann said.

Welcome back Jharmidy De Jesus, who previously played with the AquaSox in 2008, has enjoyed his return to Everett. Since joining the team, DeJesus has accounted for seven runs in three games heading into Tuesday's game, with three RBI and four runs scored in 12 at-bats.

July 5, 2011 at 2:36 PM

Mariners' minor-league report, July 5: The Kyle Seager edition

Posted by Larry Stone
Seattle Times Blog

The Mariners just announced they have signed four more players from the 2011 draft, including sixth-rounder James Zamarripa, an outfielder from Rancho Cucamonga High School in California. Also signed were left-handed pitcher Nick Valenza (18th round), right-handed pitcher Richard White (23rd) and right-handed pitcher Gabe Saquilon (25th). All four will be assigned to the rookie-level Peoria Mariners of the Arizona Summer League, the club said.

The Mariners have now signed 31 of the 51 players from the 2011 draft, but none of their first six selections.

Here is today's Mariners' minor-league report. (I've removed a couple of repeated paragraphs. Thanks to Bil522).

The biggest story on the farm for the Mariners right now is Kyle Seager, who has been tearing up the Pacific Coast League since he was promoted from Double-A Jackson on June 23.

Seager had two more hits yesterday in Tacoma's 9-4 loss to Colorado Springs. Since coming up to Tacoma he is hitting .480 (24-for-50) with nine multi-hit games, including 15 runs, four doubles, one triple, one homer and

nine RBIs. He's hit safely in all 11 games. And it just so happens -- by design, of course -- that Seager is splitting his time almost equally between second base and third base. He's played five games at each position, with one start at shortstop. Seager had been hitting .312 in 66 games for Jackson, with four homers and 37 RBIs. He played 54 games at second, three at third, and 10 at shortstop.

Seager was drafted (in the third round of the 2009 draft) as a second baseman, the position he played at North Carolina. But the Mariners drafted his Tar Heels teammate, Dustin Ackley, in the first round, and turned him into a second baseman. Judging by Ackley's performance during his first two-plus weeks in the majors, second base on the Mariners is going to be occupied for awhile. That blocks Seager, and explains why he's being used at third base. Obviously, that's a position of dire need for the Mariners, with Chone Figgins flaming out badly and no visible signs of improvement. Adam Kennedy has filled in nicely but he can't play every day.

Could Seager get a try at third with the Mariners? I don't think that's too far-fetched. The Mariners have shown a great willingness this year to look at minor-league prospects, including ones that seemed too raw for the majors (I'm thinking Carlos Peguero, who had 25 games at the Triple-A level when he was called up). The Mariners will very soon have no need for third catcher Jose Yopez, who was called up to cover them when Miguel Olivo had to miss a few games with cramps and a thigh strain. Olivo is back in the lineup tonight in San Diego, and Josh Bard is on hand to be the backup catcher. Yopez will be going down soon, giving the M's an opportunity to bring up Seager and give him a look at third base.

Remember, Mike Carp was the last player tearing up the PCL, and it didn't translate to the majors (though he only got 35 at-bats). Carp was hitting .200 when he was sent back to Tacoma the other day. That said, the Mariners can't just wait for a Figgins' revival, one that may never come. Kyle Seager is an increasingly intriguing option.

July 5, 2011 at 10:02 AM

Looking at Michael Pineda's All-Star snub

Posted by Larry Stone

Seattle Times Blog

I've always been a big believer in making the All-Star Game as fun and exciting for fans as possible. If that means that a past-his-prime superstar, such as Derek Jeter, gets elected by the fans, so be it. Detroit's Jhonny Peralta obviously has dramatically better numbers than Jeter, but no one except perhaps his family and die-hard Tigers fans are going to bemoan the absence of Jhonny Peralta from the All-Star Game, whereas a lot of people will be happy to see Derek Jeter, who is on the doorstep of 3,000 hits. There's something to be said for a body of work in an event that is still largely an exhibition. (I know it's for home-field advantage, but a few nostalgia picks aren't going to make a major impact in the competitive aspect of the game).

On the other extreme, I've always believed that another key element in making the game fun and exciting is showcasing the new stud on the block. Who can forget the stir caused by Mark Fidrych in 1976 when he burst onto the scene, talking to baseballs and mowing down opponents. The Bird wound up starting the All-Star Game for the American League in Philadelphia that year, and it was a huge spectacle.

It's why I advocated, to some criticism, putting Stephen Strasburg on last year's All-Star despite his minimal innings at the time. I just felt that he was the most hyped rookie in memory, he had been dominant in his short time in the majors, and fans would love to see him facing hitters like A-Rod, Josh Hamilton and Jose Bautista. The National League decision-makers didn't feel the same way -- and neither did Strasburg, for that matter. He said he would have been uncomfortable making the team with such a slim resume, and I fully understand that. But I still think it would have been good for baseball to have him there (though if he had pitched, people probably would have blamed the extra work for contributing to his subsequent elbow injury).

In 1998, National League manager Jim Leyland received considerable criticism -- fully deserved, in my opinion -- for leaving Cubs rookie Kerry Wood off the All-Star team. Wood was a phenom in his own right, striking out 20 Astros in a game in May and being hailed as the next Nolan Ryan or Roger Clemens. He was 8-3 with a 3.37 ERA (in a season of offensive explosion, don't forget -- it was the year Mark McGwire would hit 70 homers and Sammy Sosa 66 -- with 139 strikeouts in 93 innings at the time the teams were chosen.

But Leyland, managing the NL by virtue of winning the World Series the previous year with Florida, used a computer formula to pick his pitchers. According to an Associated Press story, the computer took into account wins, losses, ERA, wins against teams over .500, quality starts, games with averaging more than one strikeout per inning and games averaging less than one hit per inning. When he crunched the numbers, Wood came out tied for 11th, so Leyland left him off.

"I did not consider the marketing aspect," Leyland said at the time. "I tried to pick the guys I thought were most deserving, and that's what I did."

But there's nothing wrong with a little marketing at a time MLB is fighting to make up the ground it has lost to the NFL. I discussed the Wood situation as it related to Strasburg in a blog post one year ago. Leyland should have stepped away from his computer program and put the one guy everyone wanted to see on his team.

That brings us to Michael Pineda, who was left off the American League All-Star team Sunday despite his glittering numbers (7-5, 2.65 ERA, 102 innings, 73 hits, .198 opponents average, 99 strikeouts, 32 walks). Pineda hasn't caused quite the national stir of Fidrych, Wood or Strasburg, but blame that on the fact he plays for the Mariners, who have fallen from the forefront of MLB teams. Those who are paying attention realize that Pineda is a true phenomenon, and he's photogenic, too -- a huge man throwing high heat always play well. The All-Star Game would have been a nice showcase for an emerging MLB star.

Ron Washington, the AL manager from Texas, had five pitchers selected for him by virtue of a vote of the players: Justin Verlander, James Shields, Josh Beckett, Jered Weaver and Felix Hernandez. Three relievers came from the Player Ballot: Mariano Rivera, Chris Perez and Brandon League.

That left Washington with five spots to fill out his standard 13-man staff. One went to Gio Gonzalez, the obvious choice as the lone Athletic on the squad. Two went to relievers: Aaron Crow (the lone Royal) and Jose Valverde (no argument there).

Washington thus had two starting spots to fill at his discretion. He said he wanted some lefties on his staff, so he went with C.J. Wilson from his own team and David Price from the Rays. Pineda had better credentials than either of them -- and also better than snubbed lefty C.C. Sabathia. of the Yankees. Washington said that Wilson's past experience as a short reliever makes him valuable in an All-Star setting. Whatever. Washington earned the right for nepotism by winning the AL pennant. It's a time-honored All-Star tradition. Maybe one day Eric Wedge will have the opportunity to err on the side of Mariners.

It's hard to get too worked up about a team like the Mariners, losers of 101 in two of the last three years and under .500 at the time of the All-Star picks, being slighted when they had two All-Star picks in League and Hernandez. But if Pineda winds up in the All-Star Game as a replacement for one of several pitchers scheduled to throw on Sunday, and thus ineligible to participate, I think MLB will be the better for it.

July 5, 2011 at 11:22 PM

Mariners did the little things right when they needed to in this one

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

If you missed Geoff Baker Live! this afternoon (replay below), a viewer asked whether Jack Cust was "safe" at DH for now. Sure, he's safe in the respect that Mike Carp won't be replacing him. But I also replied that Ichiro was about due for another DH "rest" and what do you know? Ichiro is in there at DH tonight.

Another viewer wanted to know how close the Mariners have to be to first place for the front office to consider them deadline "buyers". I also re-state my case for why this team should take a shot now. On that note, somebody asked me why CEO Howard Lincoln would want to fight for a payroll increase and add a bat this year when he wouldn't do it nine years ago with Lou Piniella still around and packed houses at Safeco Field. Somebody also asked me about why the team won't play Jack Wilson at third base. I used the Wilson situation to offer up a comment on how the M's have failed to maximize their 25-man roster at times.

On to the post...

The Mariners didn't get a whole lot right other than Felix Hernandez clicking and Dustin Ackley hitting for the first nine innings. But they made up for it late in this 4-2 win over the Oakland Athletics.

One of the key moments came in the ninth, when Miguel Olivo threw out his third baserunner of the night -- the ever-dangerous Coco Crisp. Think about how Crisp has wrecked the M's with his speed over the years. If this was 2010, Crisp likely would have stolen second, then third and then come home on a sac fly to win the game. In fact, I recall him doing something along those lines last season.

Not this time. With a one-run lead already blown in the ninth and only one out, Olivo delivered with his arm and gunned Crisp down.

Then came the next little thing done right in the 10th. You had Franklin Gutierrez reaching on a single in what manager Eric Wedge said was his best at-bat of the season. Then, after the M's failed to bunt him over, Gutierrez pulled off a big steal of second base with one out.

That was key because the A's then walked Ichiro to set up the moment that changed the game.

Brendan Ryan hit a soft-grounder that looked like an inning-ending double play. But then Ichiro came sliding in hard, forcing shortstop Cliff Pennington to throw high and wide to first base. The error allowed Gutierrez to score. Ryan took second and then he, too, scored on an Adam Kennedy double.

So, yes. Ichiro over the years has been accused of not doing the things it sometimes takes to win games. Not this time. No one was doing it this time.

"Typically, in that situation, you want to avoid the double-play," Ichiro said through interpreter Antony Suzuki. "So, I did what I thought was best to avoid the double-play. That's what I had in mind."

Wedge was thrilled. "I told him 'Hey, way to play the game'," Wedge said. "He went in there hard. He recognized that it was kind of a soft ground ball. He knew what they were going to try to do, went in there and was aggressive...and that was a difference-maker for us."

And so, a game that could have resulted in the type of loss that may have killed this team's contention hopes winds up in another close victory.

The Mariners keep getting it done.

Hernandez got it done all night long. He had all his pitches working and struck out 10, as opposed to in some games where only some of his pitches were effective.

"I had command of all my pitches and I was finding the strike zone," Hernandez said. "That's me right there. That's what I have to do. Throw strikes."

Hernandez said he's managed to get by, on occasion, with only two or three pitches. As long as he commands them. He hasn't always done that as well as he did tonight.

And the Mariners needed it.

Jamey Wright came through in the 10th to notch his first career save in what was his 500th appearance.

"That's the fun part that it worked out that way," Wright said. "I've never been in that situation before...I'd rather not pitch in the (10th). Leaguer (Brandon League) has been solid for us."

League has indeed been, but tonight gave up his first earned run in 20 appearances when Carlos Peguero couldn't get to that bloop single in the ninth. Wedge said he didn't think Peguero got a bad break on the ball.

It was a tough play because the infield was playing in and Peguero was the only one who had a shot at it. I thought he hesitated initially. Anyhow, the M's overcame the hit by Crisp and won the game.

Another great performance by Ackley. I really like the way he challenged Ryan Sweeney's arm on that tag-up play in the second inning. The ball wasn't hit all that deep and it was close.

"he was deep enough to where he was going to have to make a great throw to get me out," Ackley said. "I just ran as hard as I could."

And the throw from Sweeney indeed was not good enough. It was just offline enough for Ackley to beat the sweep tag.

One more note to end the night with. Somebody told Hernandez after the game about the handful of "King's Corner" fans perched in the upper decks of the "Mount Davis" bleachers in center field. "Really?" Hernandez said, somewhat disbelieving.

Luckily, I'd snapped the photo of those fans for the blog. Pulled out my trusty iPhone and downloaded the page and Hernandez got to see it.

"Aw, that's cool," he said.

Good ending to a night that could have gone very wrong for the M's.

July 5, 2011 at 9:58 PM

Mariners survive collapse in ninth, pull it out in 10th

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

On to the post...

This was a two-man, two-run show for the Mariners for most of tonight. And it didn't look like the Mariners would need 10 innings for a 4-2 victory over the Oakland A's because Felix Hernandez produced eight innings of one-run ball in which he struck out 10.

And because Dustin Ackley supplied all of the offense until the 10th.

Ackley singled, stole a base and forced an error that sent him to third in the second inning. He then tagged up and scored on a fly ball that wasn't really hit deeply enough by Carlos Peguero. But Ackley challenged the arm of left fielder Ryan Sweeney and it paid off as the resulting throw was just offline enough. Ackley then made sure throws didn't factor into it in the seventh inning when he drilled a Trevor Cahill pitch over the center field wall.

But it wasn't enough.

Kurt Suzuki narrowed the lead with a two-out solo homer off Hernandez in the bottom of the eighth. And then, Jemile Weeks hit a leadoff double in the 10th off Brandon League, then wound up scoring when Carlos Peguero couldn't get to a Coco Crisp blooper to shallow left field.

So, blown save for League and extra innings we went.

But Franklin Gutierrez singled in the 10th and wound up scoring when Cliff Pennington threw away the back-end of a double play that would have ended the inning. Sometimes, it's better to be lucky than good. Adam Kennedy added a double to bring home an insurance run and Jamey Wright finished off the 10th.

Whew!

Speaking of Hernandez, he was excellent tonight. Not as usual. He hasn't always looked this good, including last week against the Braves.

Yeah, it helps when you're playing a team almost as poor as your own at scoring. The A's have the second-worst-scoring offense in all of baseball and looked the part in this one.

But Hernandez didn't even allow them to breathe until it was too late.

Only one Oakland batter reached second base against Hernandez, that being David DeJesus in the fifth. And that threat was ended with a strikeout.

Hernandez himself admitted he has lacked the start-to-start excellence he demonstrated in the latter-half of last season. Perhaps that was too big an act to follow. Hernandez has still been pretty good.

Tonight, though, he was great. And his team needed every bit of it. Even that wasn't enough in the end. But it was enough to buy the Mariners some time. And that, they most certainly needed.

July 5, 2011 at 9:40 PM

Mariners at Oakland Athletics: July 5, 2011 game thread

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

All of those missed opportunities came back to haunt the Mariners in the ninth. Brandon League allowed a leadoff double to Jemile Weeks, who was bunted to third. Coco Crisp then hit a soft flyball to shallow left that Carlos Peguero got a late break on and was unable to catch despite a sliding effort.

Yeah, a better left fielder probably catches it and we're outta here one batter later.

In any event, League blows the save. He was pretty fortunate to escape in a 2-2 tie and send this to the 10th after Crisp was caught stealing and then -- one walk later -- Conor Jackson lined out hard to Peguero in left.

Seattle had two on with one out in the top of the ninth before Miguel Olivo and Peguero went down swinging. This team needs additional bats. Especially in left field.

Well lookie here at what we've got. It's the foreign services branch of The King's Court, perched way in the upper decks of the massive "Mount Davis" bleachers in center field.

If you missed Geoff Baker Live! this afternoon (replay above), a viewer asked whether Jack Cust was "safe" at DH for now. Sure, he's safe in the respect that Mike Carp won't be replacing him. But I also replied that Ichiro was about due for another DH "rest" and what do you know? Ichiro is in there at DH tonight.

Another viewer wanted to know how close the Mariners have to be to first place for the front office to consider them deadline "buyers". I also re-state my case for why this team should take a shot now. On that note, somebody asked me why CEO Howard Lincoln would want to fight for a payroll increase and add a bat this year when he wouldn't do it nine years ago with Lou Piniella still around and packed houses at Safeco Field.

Somebody also asked me about why the team won't play Jack Wilson at third base. I used the Wilson situation to offer up a comment on how the M's have failed to maximize their 25-man roster at times.

9:17 p.m.: Wouldn't you know it, the M's won't let us all out of here easily tonight, with Felix Hernandez yielding a two-out, solo homer to left by (who else?) Kurt Suzuki to make it a 2-1 game. Hernandez then allowed a single by Ryan Sweeney, but Cliff Pennington grounded into a force out at second to keep Seattle on top.

Hernandez is done. We'll see Brandon League in the ninth going for save No. 24. And it won't be easy, with the top of the order due up. League could use an insurance run or two here. Hey, Dustin Ackley is due up this inning, so you never know.

9:04 p.m.: Dustin Ackley hit the first pitch of the seventh inning over the center field wall for his third big league homer and a 2-0 lead for the Mariners.

And Felix Hernandez ran with it, getting the side in order in the seventh and notching his ninth strikeout in the process.

Brad Ziegler took over from Trevor Cahill in the eighth and got three consecutive groundouts, so Hernandez is back out there already. Can't type fast enough to get this done -- whoops, there's strikeout No. 10 for Hernandez to start the eighth -- in order to post before the outs are made.

8:40 p.m.: That's eight strikeouts through six scoreless innings for Felix Hernandez, who carries this 1-0 lead into the seventh. The M's put two on with two out in the top of the inning on a single by Ichiro and a walk by Adam Kennedy.

But Justin Smoak went down swinging. Seattle just can't deliver the big hits in key situations this trip or this entire last month. They need every bit of Hernandez at his best tonight.

8:22 p.m.: We've already played five innings here and both teams are living up to their reputation for offensive ineptitude. Seattle leads it 1-0, though the A's had a chance to tie it in the fifth. David DeJesus was hit by a pitch with two out and then stole second.

But Felix Hernandez caught Kurt Suzuki looking at a high fastball with the count full to end the threat.

The M's have gone six up, six down the last two innings. Settling into a familiar pattern.

7:51 p.m.: Three innings done and Felix Hernandez still has a 1-0 lead. Kurt Suzuki led off the third inning with a hard single to left. But the Mariners caught a break again when Ryan Sweeney whiffed on a hit-and-run and Suzuki was easily thrown out at second.

Hernandez struck out Cliff Pennington to end the inning.

7:34 p.m.: The Mariners opened the scoring -- barely -- with an unearned run in the second and lead the game 1-0. Dustin Ackley led off with a single, then stole second on a Miguel Olivo strikeout. The throw by catcher Kurt Suzuki wound up in the outfield, enabling Ackley to take third.

Carlos Peguero then ripped a long liner just foul down the right field line. Nearly one of his trademark home runs. Peguero then hit a soft flyball to shallow left. Ackley tagged up and used a good feet-first slide to beat Suzuki's tag after an offline throw from left fielder Ryan Sweeney.

7:21 p.m.: Felix Hernandez caught a break in the first inning and we're still scoreless heading to the second. Hernandez yielded a one-out single to center by Jemile Weeks, who then stole second base. But Weeks overslid the bag and was tagged out. I'm told it's at least the third time he's done that but the first time he's been caught. A strikeout and groundout ended things from there.

7:14 p.m.: We're only a half-inning in and already, the Mariners have wasted a chance. Brendan Ryan stroked a one-out double off the wall in deepest left center, but Adam Kennedy grounded out and Justin Smoak went down swinging. Got to do more with those chances.

7:05 p.m.: Felix Hernandez takes the mound tonight, trying to secure a series win for the Mariners. Hernandez's next start after that will be on Sunday, preventing him from pitching in the All-Star Game. That could lead to Michael Pineda being added to the All-Star team. If that happens, it's possible the M's would back him off a bit after the break.

The M's have four games versus Texas to start the "second half" and then, there's an off-day. M's manager Eric Wedge discussed that a big pre-game.

Erik Bedard is here with the team in Oakland and will start throwing soon in anticipation of being back in there right after the break. Right now, he's slotted to go about three or four days into that stretch against the Rangers.

Pineda? There's a good chance he won't be. The M's have considered pushing him back until they hit the road to Toronto.

Again, some of that has to do with spreading out some of his starts so that he can make it through September without having to be shut down. The one fear, Wedge said, is that he might be backed off too much.

The team doesn't want a 10-day rest between outings for him.

But if he pitches in the All-Star Game, part of that would factor into it, because at least it would be game action. Nothing is set yet. These are just some of the things the M's are looking at for now.

The lineups:

Mariners (42-43)

51 Ichiro Suzuki (L) DH
26 Brendan Ryan SS
4 Adam Kennedy (L) 3B
17 Justin Smoak (S) 1B
13 Dustin Ackley (L) 2B
30 Miguel Olivo C
8 Carlos Peguero (L) LF
21 Franklin Gutierrez CF
56 Greg Halman RF

34 Felix Hernandez RHP

Athletics (38-48)

19 Jemile Weeks (S) 2B
29 Scott Sizemore 3B
4 Coco Crisp (S) CF
55 Hideki Matsui (L) DH
28 Conor Jackson 1B
12 David DeJesus (L) RF
8 Kurt Suzuki C
15 Ryan Sweeney (L) LF
2 Cliff Pennington (S) SS

53 Trevor Cahill RHP

July 5, 2011 at 4:06 PM

Ichiro in at DH; Miguel Olivo back at catcher for Mariners

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

Funny, but on Geoff Baker Live! this afternoon (replay below), a viewer asked whether Jack Cust was "safe" at DH for now. Sure, he's safe in the respect that Mike Carp won't be replacing him on a regular basis now that he's in Class AAA. Cust should get more playing time. But I also replied that Ichiro was about due for another DH "rest" and what do you know? Ichiro is in there at DH tonight. Greg Halman will be in right field, Franklin Gutierrez in center and Carlos Peguero in left.

Oh yeah, and Miguel Olivo is back in at catcher. We sort of knew he would be after he ran well yesterday. First time in a week for him.

Also on today's show, a viewer wanted to know how close the Mariners have to be to first place for the front office to consider them deadline "buyers".

I also re-state my case for why this team should take a shot now. The one thing those who continuously argue for "future building" above all else have going for them is, they never have to be proven right or wrong. Because their end game is always in the future.

On that note, somebody asked me why CEO Howard Lincoln would want to fight for a payroll increase and add a bat this year when he wouldn't do it nine years ago with Lou Piniella still around and packed houses at Safeco Field.

Somebody asked me about why the team won't play Jack Wilson at third base. I used the Wilson situation to offer up a comment on how the M's have failed to maximize their 25-man roster at times.

July 5, 2011 at 9:41 AM

Mariners need to be leery of running their veterans into the ground

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

Adam Kennedy finished off the first game of a series in Washington two weeks ago with a .283 batting average and a .755 on-base-plus slugging percentage. This morning, the average is down to .265 and the OPS is at .719.

What happened in the interim?

Well, the Mariners gave him a day off after that first game in Washington, then ran him out there in seven consecutive games, in which he went 4-for-28 at the plate. The team then had an off-day, following which, Kennedy has started in three of four contests since and made an appearance in the one game he didn't start.

Kennedy is still one of the MVP candidates for this year's team from a position player perspective. And this post has zero to do with those pop-ups he missed yesterday, which he simply could not see and weren't anyone's fault.

But the Mariners have to be leery of playing the 35-year-old as if he's still 25. Because when they do that, his numbers tend to dip accordingly.

Miguel Olivo is in a similar boat. Prior to his injury, he was on-pace to play 145 or so games this year. No problem, you say? He's done that before, after all. Well, yeah. Olivo himself made that very same argument to me yesterday morning.

Well, he actually hasn't played that much -- ever. His most games played in any season was 127 in 2006 with Florida. That's a long time ago.

Today, even after his injury, he's still on-pace to appear in 133 games. His most ever.

Some folks have no problem with that, since this was a team in need of on-field and off-field leadership and Olivo and Kennedy have been the two biggest suppliers of that amongst position players.

But if you're going to keep running Olivo out there, you have to take what comes with that. Just like with Kennedy.

And Olivo in the second half of last year faded from a .935 OPS to a .539. That's not very good.

This year, for all he's done power-wise, Olivo has still produced an OPS of just .666 -- 40 points below his career norm.

Not surprisingly, his biggest slump has come recently. Olivo hit just .189 in June prior to his injury, which was even worse average-wise than his .217 month of April. What saved Olivo's numbers in June was the eight home runs he hit, which boosted his OPS and obscured the fact he was becoming more of an all-or-nothing type at the plate.

There is a reason we've been calling in this space and in my Talkin' Baseball segment of KJR AM 950's Mitch in the Morning show for Josh Bard to be promoted for a while now. Nothing against Chris Gimenez, who filled a need early on by being there as a potential outfield replacement when Franklin Gutierrez was out.

But keeping a backup catcher on your roster and rarely ever playing him was not smart baseball. You need to use the 25-man roster better than that. And if the Mariners were not prepared to use their backup catcher like a real backup, then they had to find a way to lose him and get a real backup in there.

Because Olivo, like Kennedy, is no spring chicken, no matter how tough he is. And he is.

But he's a better tough guy if he's doing the things that made him valuable to the team in the first place. And he can only do that if he isn't worn into the ground by the All-Star Break.

It should not have taken an injury to Gimenez and Olivo to force the Mariners' hand in this matter. Bard should have been up here a long time ago. The team isn't exactly suffering with him behind the plate.

And no matter what Eric Wedge says about the need for Olivo to run better before he plays after his injury, I'd have to think that some of the week he's missed since was to give him a needed rest.

Don't forget, the Mariners begin the unofficial "second half" of the season against the Rangers at home, then fly out to Toronto, Boston and New York. Talk about mid-summer saunas. Each and every one of those cities can have brutal humidity in late July. If you have veterans already wearing down, they will be hard-pressed to survive that road trip completely healthy and productive.

The Mariners have taken steps to protect Olivo by finally getting Bard up here.

And now, they have to be careful with Kennedy. Wedge knows this. But his options are somewhat limited.

It's one reason he keeps hoping, and praying, that Chone Figgins can somehow turn things around. That way, he can at least throw Figgins out at third three times per week without worrying that he's giving the game away with his lineup.

The Class AAA options are limited, though if Kyle Seager keeps hitting .500 you'd have to imagine he'll get called up at some point and possibly before September.

But honestly, when folks out there say that the Mariners are not just "one bat away" from contending, they tend to miss the point. That one bat won't just add new stats to the equation. It might help bump up the stats of existing Mariners.

And yes, I do think the M's need to add a couple of bats. Not just one. But they don't all have to be full-timers. Yesterday, in the comments thread, I threw the name of Chicago Cubs super-sub Jeff Baker out there. Not because his name sounds exactly like mine. But because he hits left-handers very well and would be a natural complement to Kennedy at third base if the M's stay in contention.

So, yes. Adding Baker would not only bring his numbers into play, they would also stand to boost Kennedy's by not forcing him to be played five or six days a week.

If not Baker, then some other part-timer who fits that description. And you make the other bat the full-timer in left field.

There are all types of ways to go.

But the Mariners are headed smack dab into a massive second-half wall if they don't take care of the veteran players who have done so much to get them this far.

Ichiro helps Mariners win with ... a slide?

Posted By Larry Larue on July 5, 2011 at 11:02 pm

The Tacoma News Tribune Blog

Outfielder Ichiro Suzuki has won games - and fans - for the Seattle Mariners with his arm, his glove, his bat and his speed in , but breaking up double plays with aggressive slides? Not the most often-used arrow in his quiver.

It was Ichiro's hard slide into Athletics shortstop Chad Pennington that forced Pennington into a throwing error that allowed one run to score and set up a second in the 10th inning of the Mariners 4-2 victory.

“That play was the difference-maker, and Ichiro went in hard, aggressive, and broke that play up,” manager Eric Wedge said. “I told him afterward, ‘Way to play the game!’ That’s what we want to do here.”

With one out and two on, Brendan Ryan's slow roller toward second base appeared to be perfect for a rally-killing double play. Instead, Ichiro arrived at second and slid hard - perhaps a bit out of the baseline - and undid Pennington.

The throw skidded wildly, Franklin Gutierrez scored and Ryan took second base.

“When I saw the ball hit, I had an image of breaking up the double play,” Ichiro said through his interpreter. “That was all I had in mind.”

That the win went to Brandon League instead of Felix Hernandez was one of those baseball-isn't-fair moments.

“That’s as good as I’ve seen Felix this season, and that’s saying a lot,” Wedge said. “He had fantastic command and everything was working.”

Hernandez struck out 10 batters in eight innings – the 14th time in his career he’d done so, the fifth time this season – and allowed five hits, including a home run to Kurt Suzuki.

What stopped him from pitching the ninth? Too many pitches, 122 of them.

League came in to close and gave up a leadoff single and a sacrifice bunt. Wedge had the Mariners infield playing in and Coco Crisp hit a little pop up just beyond the infield.

Rookie Carlos Peguero charged, slid and had the ball bang off his glove: RBI single.

Another rookie, Dustin Ackley, had an impact on his 15th big-league game. He singled and scored, then launched his third home run over the center field fence.

“I don’t know if that’s all I have, but it was enough,” Ackley said. “(Monday) I thought I took too many good pitches. Tonight I wanted to come out more aggressive.”

Mariners start 86th game with three catchers

Posted By Larry Larue on July 5, 2011 at 6:24 pm
The Tacoma News Tribune Blog

Whatever roster move comes when the Seattle Mariners option catcher Jose Yopez back to Tacoma remained an issue the team wouldn't discuss today - and Yopez remained on the bench for another day of major league service.

"Let's get Miguel (Olivo) through tonight and go from there," manager Eric Wedge said of the catching situation. Olivo, who had missed six games with a upper thigh strain, will start tonight.

The Mariners don't appear to have a desperate need for anything they're willing to change on their 25-man roster. They don't use all the relievers they have and will have Erik Bedard back in the rotation soon after the All-Star break.

They obviously need offense, but have three rookies in the lineup tonight. Will they bring up third baseman Matt Mangini, first-and-third baseman Alex Liddi, infielder Kyle Seagar? If so, the Mariners wouldn't do it just to have the player sit on the bench.

Here's tonight's lineup vs. RHP Trevor Cahill:

Ichiro DH
Brendan Ryan SS
Adam Kennedy 3B
Justin Smoak 1B
Dustin Ackley 2B
Miguel Olivo C
Carlos Peguero LF
Franklin Gutierrez CF
Greg Halman RF
Felix Hernandez P

Originally published July 5, 2011 at 11:11 AM | Page modified July 5, 2011 at 5:42 PM

HBO to air documentary about Jeter 3,000-hit chase

The Associated Press

NEW YORK —

HBO will broadcast a documentary about Derek Jeter's pursuit of career hit No. 3,000.

Major League Baseball Productions is following the Yankees captain for a one-hour special called "Derek Jeter 3K." The network said Tuesday that Jeter agreed to let camera crews follow him at home and while he was rehabilitating a recent calf injury.

The documentary will include new interviews with family, friends and teammates. Also interviewed will be Jeter's girlfriend, Minka Kelly, and Yankees managing general partner Hal Steinbrenner. The program will air a few weeks after Jeter reaches the milestone.

The shortstop was at 2,994 hits after returning from the disabled list Monday and going hitless against Cleveland.

Originally published July 5, 2011 at 6:57 PM | Page modified July 5, 2011 at 10:23 PM

Judge in Roger Clemens trial might limit testimony | Baseball Notebook

By Newsday and The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The federal judge presiding over Roger Clemens' upcoming perjury trial says he is leaning toward not allowing three former Yankees teammates to testify about their use of performance-enhancing drugs.

Prosecutors planned to call Andy Pettitte, Chuck Knoblauch and Mike Stanton as witnesses and expected the three former major leaguers to testify that trainer Brian McNamee's statements about their drug use in the Mitchell Report were accurate, possibly lending credibility to the prosecution's major witness.

But U.S. District Judge Reggie Walton said during a 90-minute pretrial hearing on Tuesday that he is worried that those players' testimony could jeopardize a jury's ability to make an impartial judgment about whether Clemens used performance-enhancing drugs.

The judge plans to reserve official judgment on limiting their testimony until he sees how testimony plays out in the early part of the trial, which starts Wednesday.

Clemens is charged with three counts of making false statements, two counts of perjury and one count of obstruction of Congress. The charges stem from testimony he gave under oath during a congressional hearing on Feb. 5, 2008.

Notes

- The Red Sox traded OF Mike Cameron to the Marlins, less than a week after cutting the three-time Gold Glove winner and ex-Mariner. Cameron, 38, hit .149 in 33 games for Boston.
- Three-time NL MVP Albert Pujols was activated by St. Louis, a month ahead of schedule in his recovery from a broken left wrist. He didn't start against Cincinnati.
- Brewers slugger Prince Fielder selected teammate Rickie Weeks, the Dodgers' Matt Kemp and the Cardinals' Matt Holliday to represent the National League in Monday night's Home Run Derby.