

Texas Rangers slam Oakland A's, Gio Gonzalez in 8-5 win

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

ARLINGTON, Texas -- Rain did not save Gio Gonzalez this time.

The left-hander was rocked for five runs in the first inning Friday night, sending the A's on their way to an 8-5 loss to the Rangers and burying Oakland deeper in the American League West.

Gonzalez lasted four innings, his shortest outing of 2011, and gave up a season-high seven runs. Just three runs were earned, but Gonzalez was off.

"He got in some counts where he had to throw his fastball, and they're a fastball-hitting team," A's manager Bob Melvin said.

On May 11, Gonzalez allowed seven runs in 22/3 innings against Texas, including Mitch Moreland's grand slam. Those stats were wiped out as heavy rain hit and washed out the game, which was made up Thursday.

No such luck for Gonzalez (8-6) on Friday. This time it was Mike Napoli who cracked a grand slam in the first.

"I felt like my fastball location was fine, I was hitting my spots," he said. "It's just tough breaks is all it was."

Gonzalez wasn't helped by two errors from shortstop Adam Rosales, including a grounder he let get through him in the first that could have been an inning-ending double play. "I need to put a glove on it," Rosales said. "That's a huge play for us."

The loss dropped the A's 10 games behind Texas in the A.L. West.

"I haven't even looked at the division. We're at the bottom," Melvin said. "We're just trying to play better."

Gonzalez was pitching in front of Ron Washington, the Texas manager who picked the lefty for his first All-Star game. Whether Gonzalez pitches in Tuesday's Midsummer Classic -- and how much -- will help determine how Melvin maps out his rotation coming out of the break.

Third baseman Scott Sizemore homered in the second off C.J. Wilson. Sizemore wasn't recalled from the minors until June 6, but his four homers already rank fourth on the A's.

Wilson (9-3), who ruffled the A's feathers by referring to their hitting approach as "lawyer ball" back in May, allowed four runs over seven innings and walked three.

The A's donated \$5,000 to a memorial account the Rangers set up in memory of Shannon Stone, the fan who died during Thursday's game.

Oakland A's, Texas Rangers play with heavy hearts after fan's death

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

ARLINGTON, Texas -- They played baseball at Rangers Ballpark on Friday, but the shock waves from the death of a fan who fell from the stands the night before still resonated with everyone.

That included Texas Rangers left fielder Josh Hamilton, who played with a heavy heart during Texas' 8-5 victory over the A's.

It was Hamilton who tossed a foul ball to Rangers fan Shannon Stone during the second inning Thursday. Stone flipped over a railing in the left-field bleachers while catching the ball and fell headfirst approximately 20 feet to the concrete below, suffering fatal injuries.

Addressing the issue publicly for the first time Friday afternoon, Hamilton said he had no idea a harmless gesture could turn so tragic. Stone, 39, had his 6-year-old son, Cooper, at his side as he called for the ball.

"When I glanced up there, the first person I saw was the dad and the boy," Hamilton told a mass of reporters gathered in the Rangers clubhouse. "It looked like somebody who would love to have a baseball."

Hamilton tossed the ball a bit short and saw Stone fall over the railing and disappear from sight behind the left-field wall.

"It was just hard for me, hearing the little boy screaming for his daddy after he had fallen," Hamilton said. "And then being home with my kids, it really hit home (Thursday) night. That's one of the main things I remember. It's definitely on my mind and in my heart."

Hamilton, the reigning American League Most Valuable Player, wanted to play Friday night, saying he owed it to his organization.

"I don't think you can just get rid of that in 24 hours," Rangers manager Ron Washington said. "But there's a balance, and he wants to get out there and see if he can handle that balance."

A's players -- most of whom found out about Stone's death after Thursday's game -- tried adjusting their focus back to the field Friday. Whether the accident affected their performance is hard to gauge.

Starting pitcher Gio Gonzalez was tagged for five runs -- one of them earned -- in the first inning. Temperature for the 7:09 p.m. CDT first pitch was 105 degrees, the highest ever at Rangers Ballpark.

"You just feel so bad for (Stone's) family, how an accident like that can happen," A's pitcher Trevor Cahill said. "I think with everybody, it's in the back of their mind, but everybody is kind of trying to not think about it."

Reliever Brad Ziegler said one thought stuck with him Thursday night.

"Someone came to watch us play tonight, and they lost their life. It's just something you never expect to deal with."

Hamilton's 1-for-5 night Friday was not without incident. He fouled a liner in the sixth inning that struck a fan in the head. It was believed the fan might require stitches but was not seriously hurt.

Rangers president Nolan Ryan said he spoke by phone with Stone's wife, Jenny. On her behalf, Ryan asked the media to stop showing video footage of Stone's fall.

Ryan said "she's very concerned about her son and the impact that this is having on him."

Footage from Thursday's Comcast SportsNet California broadcast made its way to the Internet, with some fans criticizing the lighthearted manner in which announcers Ray Fosse and Glen Kuiper initially addressed Stone's fall.

That was before anyone knew how serious the situation was, and Fosse quickly added: "I do hope he's OK because that is a lot of distance."

Comcast SportsNet did not allow Fosse or Kuiper to comment Friday, instead issuing this statement:

"We want to express our condolences to Shannon Stone's family. This is a terrible tragedy, and our hearts go out to everyone involved in this incident. Our coverage reflected our concern as soon as the severity of the situation became apparent."

Stone's death highlighted safety concerns at Rangers Ballpark, where in 2010 a fan fell from the second deck and suffered a fractured skull. It will surely cause other major league teams to re-examine their own stadiums.

Ryan said the Rangers will conduct a study exploring how to make their venue safer. But Arlington city officials said the railing over which Stone fell was seven inches higher than required, and that Rangers Ballpark has passed "life safety" inspection every year, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram reported.

Fan's death weighs heavy on A's, Rangers players

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Rangers infielder Michael Young called the team's mood "somber" Friday in the wake of a fan's death after falling from the stands the night before, and, he said, baseball takes a back seat after such a tragedy.

A's reliever Brad Ziegler added that all the players on both sides are grieving.

Firefighter Shannon Stone, 39, fell 20 feet from the first row of seats in left field onto a concrete walkway behind the out-of-town video scoreboard while trying to catch a baseball tossed his way by Texas outfielder Josh Hamilton during the second inning Thursday. Blunt force trauma was the cause of death, according to the Tarrant County medical examiner.

"I threw the ball and saw him go for it and saw him go right over the edge there," Hamilton said. "When that happened, it was like disbelief because I know what's behind there. People don't realize what is behind there and they might not have thought it was a big deal, but I understood this person could be hurt pretty bad.

"I was in shock. I kept looking behind me hoping somebody was behind there helping him."

Stone attended the game with his 6-year-old son, and Hamilton said he could hear the boy screaming for his father, a memory that still was weighing on Hamilton on Friday. Hamilton elected to play and was in the lineup, but his thoughts and prayers were with the Stone family, Hamilton said.

Hamilton said he would continue to throw balls into the crowd, but he said that he will gauge where the fans are sitting and where the railings are.

Ziegler, who witnessed Stone being taken away on a stretcher and sobbed after learning of Stone's death, said he won't hesitate to toss balls to fans.

"Absolutely," Ziegler said. "The fans are the reason we play the games. It makes them smile. It makes them happy."

Major League Baseball issued a statement that said, "Our players are encouraged to be fan-friendly, and we will carefully review this incident with our clubs to continue to ensure a safe environment for our fans."

Rangers President Nolan Ryan said during a news conference that safety is the team's top priority and that although the railings in the ballpark exceed the height required by local building codes, the team is prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure fans' well-being.

Last year, in the same park, a fan fell from the second deck and was hospitalized with a fractured skull.

"One time is too many," said A's reliever Craig Breslow, who like Ziegler was waiting in the tunnel to the bullpen as Stone was taken past on a stretcher.

"I know everything is up to code," said A's starter Brandon McCarthy, a former Texas player. "Accidents are accidents. It's just a tragedy - you don't expect to go to a game with your son and have something like this happen. It's gut-wrenching to think about it.

"It's not a baseball issue - even if you've never been in this park and you don't know the players, this is something that is tough on a different level," he said. "Everyone knows someone with a kid. The baseball aspect doesn't even come into play."

Both teams will wear black ribbons on their jerseys for the remainder of the series in memory of Stone, and the flags at Rangers Ballpark were at half-staff Friday. There was a moment of silence for Stone before the game.

"It's kind of a reality check," A's starter Trevor Cahill said. "When you look at this game, it's not as important as you think it is. That gets put into perspective. The first thing is safety, and life, when something like this happens."

CSN California broadcasters Ray Fosse and Glen Kuiper drew some criticism from viewers in the wake of Stone's death. Fosse and Kuiper, who clearly did not know the extent of Stone's injuries, took a light-hearted tone about the incident after replaying the fall, but as it became clear that the drop was severe, Fosse immediately expressed concern for the fan's welfare.

CSN California said neither broadcaster would comment Friday, and the outlet issued a statement that read, "We want to express our condolences to Shannon Stone's family. This is a terrible tragedy and our hearts go out to everyone involved in this incident."

"Our coverage reflected our concern as soon as the severity of the situation became apparent."

More on the death, including information on how to donate to the family. **B7**

Memorial fund

The Rangers have established a memorial account for Shannon Stone, who died in a fall Thursday at their stadium. Contributions can be made at www.texasrangers.com/fund.

Rangers chase A's All-Star Gio Gonzalez early

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

A 105-degree night at Rangers Ballpark, the hottest temperature ever at first pitch here, somehow wound up seeming similar to a rainy day in May.

On Friday night, the Rangers jumped out early on All-Star Gio Gonzalez, whose previous pummeling at Texas was washed out by a rainstorm, and they went on to beat the downward-spiraling A's 8-5.

Oakland has lost 11 of its past 16 games, and the A's are a season-high 10 games behind the Rangers in the AL West, their largest deficit in the division since last October.

"We're at the bottom," Oakland manager Bob Melvin said. "If we look up, we're looking through everyone, and there's no use doing that. We're just trying to play better more consistently. There's just no reason to look up right now."

In his shortest outing of the season, Gonzalez gave up a season-high seven runs and three homers, solo shots by Ian Kinsler and Adrian Beltre and a grand slam by Mike Napoli. In a game at Texas on May 11, Gonzalez allowed seven runs, including a grand slam by Mitch Moreland, but that game was rained out and the result, and stats, were wiped out.

Gonzalez, asked if Friday's start reminded him of that May outing, said, "Absolutely not." He said that he was hitting his spots Friday, but there were some tough breaks - particularly when he fell behind and had to come in with fastballs.

"The first one was a belt-high fastball and he just drove it," Gonzalez said of Napoli's slam. "Same with Kinsler. Beltre, he got one around the letters and he still hit it out."

Gonzalez had allowed just one homer in his previous six outings. Gonzalez, who is from Miami, said the heat was not an excuse and noted that All-Star C.J. Wilson, who earned the win, was working in the same conditions.

Only three of the runs Gonzalez allowed during his four innings were earned because of Adam Rosales' first-inning error on a grounder by Beltre, which Melvin called a potential double-play ball.

The A's output was, for them, robust: Scott Sizemore homered in the second inning (the first homer Wilson had allowed in 44 2/3 innings), Coco Crisp and Josh Willingham drove in runs in the sixth, and two runs came in on double-play balls.

"We continued to go out and battle. We showed some life," Gonzalez said.

Rosales made two errors on grounders; the first got on him more quickly than he expected, according to Melvin, and Melvin thought the second took a bad hop. The A's have 70 errors this season, second only to Texas' 72.

The A's are 12 games below .500, matching their season low.

Trevor Cahill not eligible as replacement All-Star

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Were it not for the fact that **Trevor Cahill** will pitch on the final day of this series, the A's right-hander might be a repeat All-Star.

There were rumblings Friday that with so many American League All-Star pitchers starting Sunday that Cahill would have been among the group of potential replacements.

Cahill is also starting on the final day before the break, however, just as he did last year, rendering him ineligible to participate in the game. Cahill was still an AL All-Star last year, despite not being able to pitch.

Cahill, who is 8-6 with a 3.17 ERA, said he isn't disappointed that he can't be a replacement selection; he didn't think he was going to be going to the game, anyway.

Cahill could start again the first game back after the break, working on his regular four days' rest. Manager **Bob Melvin** said he will announce the post-break rotation after Sunday's game.

Melvin said the plans for the rotation will be contingent to some extent on how much work **Gio Gonzalez** gets in Tuesday night's All-Star Game.

Gonzalez is scheduled to travel to the game on the Rangers' charter to Phoenix on Sunday; Texas manager Ron Washington is the AL All-Star manager, and four Rangers players are on the AL team.

Briefly: Two fans were taken for treatment after being hit by foul balls, including a man near the A's dugout who left under his own power, holding his head after being struck by a foul ball by Rangers outfielder **Josh Hamilton**. Hamilton told reporters that he wished fans in that area paid more attention to play on the field rather than looking at their phones. ... The A's announced that they have donated \$5,000 to the **Shannon Stone** memorial fund set up by the Rangers.

Leading off

Streak to stop: Tonight's starter, Brandon McCarthy, has lost a career-high five games in a row - and he has not received more than three runs of support in any of his past seven starts. The ex-Texas starter has a career 2.86 ERA against the Rangers.

Drumbeat: A's will try to rev up offense against Rangers' C.J. Wilson

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Rangers Ballpark 7/8/2011, 5:10pm

As you might recall, in May, Rangers starter C.J. Wilson told Chronicle colleague John Shea that the A's engaged in "lawyer ball," arguing for calls, trying to take walks. And it's Wilson on the mound tonight against the A's; he worked a 1-2-3 first inning, striking out two.

Here's the lineup against the Rangers: Weeks 2b, DeJesus rf, Crisp cf, Willingham dh, Sizemore 3b, Jackson 1b, Sweeney lf, Suzuki c, Rosales ss. It's All-Star Gio Gonzalez, beneficiary of a rainout that washed away seven Texas runs last time he was here, on the mound.

Manager Bob Melvin said before the game that the A's need to score more runs, and better still, they need to score them early. Last night's game was the first he felt his team was just not really in - they never really threatened until the very end, and then not enough.

It's days off for Hideki Matsui, Chris Carter and Cliff Pennington. Landon Powell will be catching tomorrow and Melvin said he's not sure yet if Matsui or Willingham will be in left field.

Melvin said he'll provide the post-break rotation on Sunday - and some of it might be contingent on how much Gonzalez works in Tuesday's All-Star game.

A's announcers criticized for insensitivity

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Texas - A's broadcasters Ray Fosse and Glen Kuiper have been criticized by viewers for their joking tone when Rangers fan Shannon Stone fell from the left-field stands while trying to catch a baseball tossed by Texas outfielder Josh Hamilton in the second inning last night. "For a baseball," Fosse said at the time, and there were some chuckles in the booth.

It was clear that the broadcast team had no idea that Stone had sustained fatal injuries, and after the replay was shown, Fosse did say fairly quickly that he hoped that the fan was OK.

Comcast SportsNet California issued a statement about last night's broadcast that reads:

"We want to express our condolences to Shannon Stone's family. This is a terrible tragedy and our hearts go out to everyone involved in this incident. Our coverage reflected our concern as soon as the severity of the situation became apparent."

- Comcast SportsNet California

I made repeated requests to speak to Fosse and Kuiper this morning; I am certain that they must feel dreadful that there was any joking or laughter about an event that turned tragic.

I was told this afternoon that neither broadcaster will be available to answer questions about last night's coverage, including at the ballpark later today. It is unclear why the decision was made that they will not be answering questions.

Drumbeat: CSN California releases statement on coverage of fan's fall

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Arlington, Texas 7/8/2011 12:24pm

A's broadcasters Ray Fosse and Glen Kuiper have been criticized by viewers for their joking tone when Rangers fan Shannon Stone fell from the left-field stands while trying to catch a baseball tossed by Texas outfielder Josh Hamilton in the second inning last night. "For a baseball," Fosse said at the time, and there were some chuckles in the booth.

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A's fall as Gio scuffles in final first-half start

Lefty touched for three homers and seven runs in four innings

By Louie Horvath / MLB.com | 7/9/2011 12:45 AM ET

ARLINGTON -- Gio Gonzalez struggled for the second consecutive start against the Texas Rangers, giving up seven runs in four innings on the way to an 8-5 loss at the Ballpark in Arlington.

While the first game was rained out, this one counted. It was the second consecutive loss for the Athletics in a four-game series, and the temperature at first pitch was 105 degrees, the hottest at the start of a game in the ballpark's history.

In the rain-canceled game, the Rangers touched up Gonzalez for seven runs on six hits, including a grand slam, in 2 2/3 innings.

Friday's line was similar, as Gonzalez gave up seven runs on seven hits, again including a grand slam, in four innings.

Gonzalez retired Ian Kinsler to start the first inning, but he allowed back-to-back singles before shortstop Adam Rosales committed an error that allowed a run to score. After another single loaded the bases, Gonzalez fanned Nelson Cruz for the second out. But Mike Napoli clubbed a grand slam, putting the A's in an early hole.

"I got the first pitch up in the at-bat, and he did his job," Gonzalez said. "I gave him a good belt-high fastball, and he drilled it. It's a good lineup. You have to give credit where credit is due, these guys are a good hitting team."

All four of those runs were unearned, however, because of the error by Rosales, who was filling for Cliff Pennington. It was the first of two errors by Rosales.

"Third is probably his least favorite position, but he's played very well at shortstop for us," Melvin said. "The ball just got on him quicker than he thought, and the next one took a funny little hop, but he won't make excuses for it. I'm very confident with him at short."

Scott Sizemore hit a solo homer in the second inning to claw back one run, but Gonzalez gave up a pair of solo shots in the bottom half of the inning to make the margin 6-1.

The three home runs Gonzalez allowed weren't just a one-game high for the All-Star left-hander, they tied April for the most home runs he has surrendered in a single month this season. Gonzalez finished the first half with an 8-6 record and 2.47 ERA.

"They were just on him early," Melvin said. "He gave up a couple home runs, but he kept fighting, kept battling, ended up giving us four [innings]. We battled our way back so that we were at least significant in the game, so in that respect, for a bad outing from him, I'm certainly glad he gave me four."

The A's made a rally in the sixth, which began when David DeJesus bunted for a single. He promptly stole second and reached third on a passed ball. When Coco Crisp legged out a single to short, DeJesus scored.

Josh Willingham got his third hit since coming back from the disabled list, smoking a double into the left-field corner. Crisp raced all the way from first to score without a throw.

With Willingham on second, no outs, and the A's primed to get back in the game, Rangers All-Star C.J. Wilson struck out the next three hitters to stop the rally dead in its tracks.

"I used my brain and didn't try to overpower them," Wilson said. "I just out-located the swing and the strike zone. That's how I got out of that."

Down 8-4 in the ninth, the A's also threatened, putting runners on first and third with no outs, but Kurt Suzuki grounded into a double play. While one run scored, that effectively ended the game, and Rosales grounded out to third to make it official.

"We had a chance in the ninth to make it real interesting," Melvin said. "Any time you have opportunities when you're down like that, you'd like to expand upon it. We just weren't able to do it."

With the loss, the A's now find themselves 10 games behind Texas in the AL West. That is the largest margin all season, but Melvin said he is not concerned with the standings.

"I haven't even looked at the division, really. We're at the bottom," Melvin said. "If you look up, you're looking through everybody, and it's just not worth looking that way. We're just trying to play better and play more consistent. Once we start doing that, and we're deeper in the second half, we'll look up a little bit."

A's wear black ribbons to honor fan

By Louie Horvath / MLB.com

ARLINGTON -- Both the Athletics and the Rangers wore black ribbons on their jerseys for Friday's game to honor the memory of Lt. Shannon Stone, a firefighter who fell to his death during Thursday's game while trying to catch a ball thrown by Texas left fielder Josh Hamilton.

Brad Ziegler, who was in the Oakland bullpen at the time, said his immediate thoughts were to connect to Stone as a father.

"I'm a father, I know what it's like to have a kid," Ziegler said. "To see that guy in an extreme amount of pain, and his only thought throughout the entire time was, 'Where is my son? Make sure my son is taken care of.' It is touching, and it breaks your heart for the kid."

Conor Jackson, who hit the ball that Josh Hamilton flipped into the stands, was in the lineup again, batting sixth and playing first base. Oakland manager Bob Melvin said there was no hesitation in putting Jackson back in the lineup.

While the team was grieving, they did not feel that the incident will affect their play on the field.

"I think we'll be fine at game time," Ziegler said. "All the way up to game time, it might be a little tough, but getting out on the field, playing catch and warming up, everybody will be able to flip the switch."

Melvin said that there was not much he could say as a manager to make the players move forward, but that each person must do it in their own way.

"Last night, we addressed it, but everybody handles these things differently," Melvin said. "There's not one piece of medicine you could give somebody, because we're all human beings, and we all handle these things differently. But they know they have a job to do once the game starts."

Ziegler, who was seen hugging his father and crying outside the locker room just after the game Thursday when it was announced that Stone had died, said that he feels better today.

"I'm OK," Ziegler said. "There's going to be a stretch here where we all are going to grieve for a while. I don't feel like I'm necessarily any worse off than any of the other guys, I just expressed it a different way. I think they feel just as bad or worse than I do."

The Rangers announced that they will fly the Texas state flags in the outfield at half mast for the remainder of the weekend series.

There was also a moment of silence before the national anthem on Friday.

During the game, the A's announced that they had donated \$5,000 to a special memorial fund benefiting Stone's family.

Melvin rests regulars to avoid Texas heat

ARLINGTON -- Any series in a hot location requires a little extra care by a manager, as teams try to keep players fresh despite the heat.

Athletics manager Bob Melvin is no different, and he said every player on the bench would get at least one start during the weekend series. The temperature at the Ballpark in Arlington was 105 degrees at the time of first pitch on Friday, a record for the stadium.

"It's warm. Everybody needs a little bit of a break," Melvin said. "There will be some guys that play every day, simply because we have a limited bench. It's a little bit deeper, but everyone will have a start."

As another precautionary measure, Oakland is taking batting practice inside on Friday. Melvin did not rule out resorting to such measures again.

"I think it's important," Melvin said. "You have to get on the field the first day obviously and get a feel for the field, but after that, I don't think [the Rangers] hit a whole lot either. They hit the first day they come back from a trip, and whether or not they hit again, I'm not

The series is the first between the clubs at the stadium to feature four games in four days series since May 25-28, 2006. While they played four straight in Texas in 2009, one day was a doubleheader to make up for a previous rain delay.

"You play 162 games in 180 days, and you're on the field for three hours," Melvin said. "It's the one sport that you play every day. There is a reason why you lift weights every other day, so you can let your body recover. To an extent, sometimes, I think we overdo it just to make it look like we're doing something.

"Especially in conditions like this, you need some rest."

Early-inning struggles plague A's

ARLINGTON -- The A's have struggled to create any offense all season, but they have especially struggled to put runs on the board early in the game.

"We have to start believing in ourselves and believing we can put more than one run on the board," Athletics manager Bob Melvin said. "It's not like, 'Here's a run and go get 'em, starting pitcher.' We have to take some pressure off of them, especially in ballparks like this that are offensive ballparks. We need to start scoring some more runs, and we need to start doing it earlier."

The A's began Friday with the second inning as their least productive inning (22), with the first (26 runs) just one ahead of the seventh for the second lowest.

"We need to start scoring some runs earlier in the game," Melvin said. "It seems like even in the games that we do score some runs, typically it's not early. Typically, we get one run early."

While the A's usually stay in the game based on the strength of superior starting pitching, when the starter falters, as Rich Harden did Thursday, it can lead to an ugly scoreline.

"Yesterday just had a different feel. They got on us early," Melvin said. "Usually, with our pitching performances, you're not looking at early deficits by multiple runs, so it just felt like yesterday we were behind the eight-ball quick and could never recover."

Melvin hopes Gio exits All-Star Game rested

ARLINGTON -- Oakland manager Bob Melvin said that he hopes that A's lone All-Star, Gio Gonzalez, pitches one inning in the game to keep his innings down and to stay fresh when he returns from break.

Melvin also says that the All-Star outing may be a factor in deciding the timing of Gonzalez's next start coming out of the break.

"I will probably address (the rotation) on the last day here," Melvin said. "Certainly Gio factors in with how much he pitches in the All-Star Game. We'd like to see it at an inning, but it would be easier to forecast."

Worth noting

- The A's have not had fewer than three players on the disabled list since the end of the 2006 season. In two of the past three years they've set new highs for DL trips, sending 25 to the DL in '08 and 23 in '10.
- Kurt Suzuki's start on Friday moved him into sole possession of third place in on the A's all-time list for games caught with 538. He was tied with Mike Heath as he began the day.

A's hoping to solve early-inning woes vs. Rangers

By Aaron Taube / MLB.com

If only the Oakland A's could skip the first few innings each game, they might be higher in the standings.

The A's have been outscored 76-49 in the first two innings this season, but have actually outscored opponents 259-247 in the final seven innings. They outscored Texas, 4-1, in the final seven innings of an 8-5 Rangers win Friday at Rangers Ballpark in Arlington. The win was Texas' fifth in a row.

"We have to start believing in ourselves and believing we can put more than one run on the board," Athletics manager Bob Melvin said. "It's not like, 'Here's a run and go get 'em, starting pitcher.' We have to take some pressure off of them, especially in ballparks like this that are offensive ballparks. We need to start scoring some more runs, and we need to start doing it earlier."

Texas righty Colby Lewis (8-7, 4.29 ERA) will try to keep Oakland's bats quiet in the early going by building off an Independence Day performance in which he rebounded from a rough start to allow one run over his final five innings to earn the win.

"He was overthrowing a little bit," Rangers catcher Yorvit Torrealba said of Lewis' first two innings July 4. "Flying off with the front shoulder. His slider was kind of flat and most pitches were over the plate. He was yanking the fastball to righties, so I just told him to stay closed, keep that front shoulder closed, and throw it through me."

Lewis will be countered by Brandon McCarthy (1-5, 3.33 ERA), who returned from the disabled list on July 4 to allow two runs in 6 2/3 innings against Seattle.

A's: Melvin will rest players in heat

Due to the overwhelming heat in Arlington, Melvin said before Friday night's game that he will give his bench some playing time during the Rangers series in order to keep the A's fresh. The first-pitch temperature for Friday's game was a staggering 105 degrees, highest in the history of Rangers Ballpark.

"It's warm. Everybody needs a little bit of a break," Melvin said. "There will be some guys that play every day, simply because we have a limited bench. It's a little bit deeper, but everyone will have a start."

Rangers: Blanco placed on DL

The Rangers moved shortstop Andres Blanco to the disabled list Friday due to a stress reaction in his lower back and replaced him with shortstop Omar Quintanilla from Triple-A Round Rock.

In addition, Texas put infielder Scott Feldman on the 60-day disabled list to make room for Quintanilla on the 40-man roster.

Worth noting

- McCarthy compiled a 13-15 record over 45 appearances with the Rangers from 2007-09.
- Since winning a season-high six games in a row, the A's have now lost 11 of their past 16 games.
- After a 9-1 start, the Rangers have gone 40-40 in their past 80 games.

Gutierrez: Rangers even unsettled score with Gio

Paul Gutierrez, CSNCalifornia.com

Random observations from the A's 8-5 loss to the Texas Rangers Friday at Rangers Ballpark in Arlington...

-- The baseball gods have a funny way of evening things up. Gio Gonzalez is a witness. The seven runs -- including a grand slam -- he surrendered the Rangers in 2 2/3 innings on May 11 were washed away with the rainstorm that forced a make-up. So what did Gonzalez give up in his first visit back to Arlington? Seven runs - including a grand slam - in four innings. Though it should be noted, only three of the runs were earned.

-- The reason for so many unearned runs? Look no further than Adam Rosales, getting the rare start at shortstop in place of Cliff Pennington. His first-inning error -- he attempted to backhand Adrian Beltre's tailor-made double-play grounder -- opened the floodgates. Instead of a scoreless first inning, Gonzalez gave up a five-spot.

-- Gonzalez, of course, was not blameless. The lefty gave up two more homers in the second inning. The Rangers stayed away from his off-speed offerings - much as they did Rich Harden the night before - and sat on his fastballs.

--Simply put, the A's are not good enough to overcome so many self-inflicted wounds.

--Nor can they waste prime opportunities, or, to be more magnanimous, not take full advantage of scoring opportunities, as few and far between as they are for the A's. Bases loaded, none out? The A's need more than a double-play ground-out to score. First and third, none out? See above.

--With each loss, the A's not only fall further behind the Rangers in the American League West, they get that much closer to packing it in and embarking on a fire sale.

--Josh Willingham would fetch a nice price, especially if healthy. After his two-hit game Friday night, he is three for eight with a double and an RBI since coming off the disabled list.

Rangers' Napoli slams A's

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ARLINGTON, Texas — C.J. Wilson pitched seven effective innings, Mike Napoli hit a first-inning grand slam off Gio Gonzalez, and the Texas Rangers stretched their winning streak to five games with an 8-5 victory over the Oakland Athletics on Friday night a night after a fan was killed in a fall while catching a foul ball.

Josh Hamilton, who tossed the ball to the fan on Thursday night, hit a fan with a foul ball off his bat. The teenage male fan had blood on his face and was tended to by stadium personnel before he walked away, smiling while he held a compress to his head.

Rangers officials said the fan was treated at the stadium and was OK. They didn't identify him or provide additional details.

Wilson (9-3) won his fifth straight decision to tie Alexi Ogando for the team lead in wins, allowing four runs and five hits with eight strikeouts and three walks.

Ian Kinsler and Adrian Beltre also homered off Gonzalez (8-6), Oakland's lone All-Star.

Both teams were still dealing with the aftermath of the death of the fan from a 20-foot fall in the second inning of Thursday night's 6-0 Texas victory.

Brownwood firefighter Shannon Stone tumbled over a railing after catching a foul ball tossed into the stands by Hamilton.

"It's not been an easy day," Oakland reliever Brad Ziegler said before the game.

"There's going to be a stretch here where we're all going to grieve for a while."

Hamilton was in the starting lineup despite the emotional 24 hours, going 1 for 5. In a sixth-inning at bat, Hamilton's foul ball struck a fan seated several rows behind the Oakland dugout.

Before the game, the teams observed a moment of silence in Stone's memory. Both teams wore black ribbons on their uniform tops.

The temperature at first pitch was 105 degrees, highest in the 18-year history of Rangers Ballpark.

The A's have lost five of seven.

Gonzalez had few answers for a slugging Rangers lineup that has outscored opponents 44-15 during the five-game winning streak. He lasted a season-low four innings, giving up seven runs — only three earned — and seven hits.

Gonzalez entered the night with a 4-1 record and 2.18 ERA in nine career appearances against the Rangers. Gonzalez had good fortune on his side in his previous start at Texas on May 11 when he gave up seven runs in 2 2-3 innings, but the game was postponed by heavy rain.

The Rangers jumped on Gonzalez with a five-run first highlighted by Napoli's third career grand slam.

Texas scored the game's first run when Oakland shortstop Adam Rosales made a fielding error on Beltre's hot grounder. Michael Young reached on an infield single that rolled just inside the third base foul line to load the bases, and after Nelson Cruz struck out, Napoli ripped Gonzalez's first pitch into the left field seats for his 12th homer of the season.

Oakland's Scott Sizemore hit a solo homer in the second, the first long ball allowed by Wilson since Tampa Bay's Matt Joyce on May 31, a span of 44 1-3 innings.

The Rangers continued the power display in the second on bases-empty homers by Kinsler and Beltre for a 7-1 advantage.

Oakland's first three hitters reached in the fourth on two walks and a single, and Coco Crisp scored from third on Conor Jackson's double-play grounder to make it 7-2.

Yorvit Torrealba's RBI single in the fifth restored Texas' six-run lead.

The A's cut the deficit to 8-4 in the sixth on Crisp's RBI infield single and Josh Willingham's run-scoring double, but Wilson struck out the final three batters in the inning.

Notes: The previous record temperature at Rangers Ballpark was 103 in 2008. ... Napoli had Texas' second grand slam of the season. Beltre hit one on April 2 vs. Boston. Mitch Moreland also had a bases-loaded homer on May 11, but the stats were washed away by the rainout....

The A's announced that they have donated \$5,000 to a fund for Stone's family...

Nolan Ryan says fan's widow worried about son

By STEPHEN HAWKINS, ASSOCIATED PRESS

ARLINGTON, Texas — Nolan Ryan would always try to accommodate kids clamoring for a baseball when he was pitching. And the new owner of the Texas Rangers has had a goal of helping create cherished memories for families, for fathers and sons attending games together.

A Texas firefighter's trip to a Rangers game with his 6-year-old son turned tragic when Shannon Stone tumbled over a railing after reaching out and catching a foul ball tossed his way by reigning AL MVP Josh Hamilton, his son's favorite player.

Stone plunged about 20 feet onto the concrete below Thursday night and died about an hour later. The accident stunned players and fans alike, and it left a 36-year-old widow worried about how the boy, Cooper Stone, will recover from watching his father fall.

Shannon Stone's mother, Suzann Stone, told The Associated Press that her son and young Cooper had gone to the game in hopes of catching a ball in the stands. They even stopped on the way to Arlington to buy a new glove for the boy.

"I always told him if he wasn't my son I would want him as my best friend," Suzann Stone said, choking back sobs. "He was so good, so caring of everybody."

A moment of silence was planned before the Rangers and Oakland Athletics played the second game of their four-game series Friday night, and players for both teams were planning to wear black ribbons on their uniforms.

"This just happens to be a situation that turned into a great tragedy," Ryan said Friday, the flags at Rangers Ballpark at half-staff and a black tarpaulin covering the gap where Stone fell. "It's one of the saddest things I've ever seen at the ballpark. ... As a father and a grandfather, my heart goes out for that family."

At the request of the Stone family, MLB.com has not posted video of the accident. Ryan said he spoke by telephone Friday with Jenny Stone, the firefighter's widow in Brownwood, about 150 miles away from Arlington.

"She's very concerned about her son and the impact that this is having on him," Ryan said. "She asked if I could do anything about the video footage that is being shown."

Replays showed the boy watching as his 6-foot-3 father stretch and reach out to grab the ball and then fell through a gap of several feet between the left-field seats and the 14-foot-high outfield wall that has a video scoreboard on it.

City officials say the building code requires the guardrails to be at least 26 inches high. Ed Dryden, Arlington's building official, said railings throughout the park are 33 inches high.

Dryden and Jim Parajon, the city's director of community development and planning, said they made sure on Friday that the railings where Stone fell were up to code.

"It is a very tragic situation and we feel for the family of the victim," Parajon said.

Major League Baseball promised a review of the incident "to ensure a safe environment for our fans."

John McHale Jr., MLB's executive vice president of administration, said there is no centralized process for overseeing safety at ballparks and Stone's death may change that.

"I think the enormity of this tragedy requires we create a process, if there isn't one already," he said. "I think we're going to communicate as closely as we can with the Rangers to find out what happened and to share that information with the other clubs."

He said most safety issues are left to the clubs.

"There are building codes, there are local ordinances and the clubs are responsible with complying," he said. "We have a history of trying to control balls thrown in the stands centrally and I think that probably didn't work, so we rely on the clubs to make their own decisions on how that should be done or not done in their ballpark."

The accident was similar to one almost exactly a year earlier.

Tyler Morris, a firefighter from the Lake Cities Fire Department near Dallas, fractured his skull and sprained an ankle on July 6, 2010, after falling about 30 feet from the second deck of seats down the right-field line while trying to catch a foul ball.

"The fact that we've had two in the last year is disturbing," Ryan said. "As an organization we are going to looking into this because our No. 1 concern is the safety of our fans. We'll do whatever we have to do to make this stadium as safe as we possibly can for our fans."

After the accident last year, Ryan said the team did a study of the railings. He said the team felt the safety was adequate, but wasn't prepared to say if any changes might be made now.

It was the second fatal fall at a major league stadium this season. In May, a 27-year-old man died after he fell about 20 feet and struck his head on concrete during a Colorado Rockies game. Witnesses told police that the man had been trying to slide down a staircase railing at Coors Field and lost his balance.

Ryan said grief counseling was available for players if they needed to talk to anybody about what happened in the second inning of the Rangers' 6-0 win over Oakland. Players were informed of the fan's death after the game, when the Texas clubhouse was closed to reporters.

"This is really just one of those freak accidents that happen, it's definitely an accident," Ryan said.

He also said the Rangers Foundation was setting up a memorial account for Stone and are making a significant donation to start it.

Fan dream of catching baseball turns to nightmare

Stephen Hawkins, Associated Press

Go to the ballpark and catch a foul ball: It's what every fan wants to do.

And so it was for 6-year-old Cooper Stone.

He and his dad even stopped to buy a new glove on the way to the Texas Rangers game Thursday night. Even better, their seats were in the left field stands, shouting distance from Cooper's favorite player, reigning AL MVP Josh Hamilton.

Maybe, just maybe, he would throw one their way. In the second inning, he did.

Hamilton grabbed a foul ball that ricocheted into left field, and tossed it into the stands. The boy's father, 6-foot-3 Shannon Stone, caught it, tumbled over a 33-inch-tall railing and plunged 20 feet onto concrete below, right in front of his son.

The 39-year-old firefighter died a short time later at a hospital.

"That's what they were there for, was to catch a ball," Shannon Stone's mother, Suzann, said. "Cooper loves baseball and he's a big Josh Hamilton fan. Had his jersey."

Pitching great Nolan Ryan, now the team's president, said the tragedy "hits us at our roots of who we are."

"We're about making memories, family entertainment," he said. "I certainly understand - and I'm no different than our fan base - when I was younger and I went to the ballpark, my hope was to get a foul ball."

Jenny Stone, the victim's 36-year-old widow, worried how her only son would cope with the tragedy, said Ryan, who spoke with her by phone in Brownwood, about 150 miles from Arlington.

At the request of the Stone family, MLB.com has not posted video of the accident.

Replays showed the boy watching as his father stretched and reached out to grab the ball and then fell through a gap of several feet between the left-field seats and the 14-foot-high outfield wall, which has a video scoreboard on it.

Shannon Stone had been a firefighter since 1993, according to Del Albright, the fire chief in Brownwood. He had risen to the rank of lieutenant and in 2008 had received a distinguished service medal for rescuing an elderly woman from a house fire.

"He was very respected by his crew and looked up to by other firemen," Albright said. "... He was a great leader and great firefighter. The only thing that surpassed his love for the fire service was the love for his family and his boy. Cooper was always by his side."

City officials say the building code requires the guardrails to be at least 26 inches high. Ed Dryden, Arlington's building official, said railings throughout the park are 33 inches high.

"These code requirements are not unique to the city of Arlington but represent the industry standards used by cities and countries worldwide," Dryden said.

There have been other falls at the 17-year-old stadium. In 1994, Hollye Minter fell about 35 feet from the Home Run Porch in right field as she posed for a picture in the inaugural game at the new ballpark. She broke several vertebrae, ribs and teeth. Last July, a man survived with a skull fracture after tumbling from the upper deck as he tried to catch a foul ball.

After last year's accident, Ryan said the team studied the railings and felt safety was adequate; he said Friday he wasn't prepared to say if changes might be made now.

Minter told a reporter last summer, "Maybe this happened to me so they would raise the rails in Home Run Porch. Maybe this gentleman fell (from the upper deck) so that the Rangers will now really open their eyes and raise the rails everywhere else, because next time - and I hate to say this - somebody's going to die."

On Friday, Minter, still struggling to absorb the news of Stone's death, said: "Someone said to me, 'Well, it should get their attention now.' I said, 'No, we had their attention in '94 and we had their attention last year.' We got their attention again. I don't know what it's going to take. Maybe if they had made changes last year, that little boy would still have a father."

Grief and Questions After Death at Ballpark

By TOM SPOUSTA and LYNN ZINSER, New York Times

ARLINGTON, Tex. — Josh Hamilton doesn't make a habit of tossing baseballs to fans in the stands, so when he fielded a foul ball early in Thursday night's game against the Oakland Athletics, he did what he usually does — he turned it over to the ball girl along the left-field line at Rangers Ballpark.

As he did, though, he heard a shout from behind the left-field fence. There stood a father and son, the two of them in the first row of an elevated bank of seats. "Hey, Hamilton, how about the next one?" the father asked.

"I just gave him a nod," Hamilton, the All-Star outfielder for the Rangers, said.

And when, in the second inning, Conor Jackson of the A's sent a foul ball to left, Hamilton chased it down. This one wasn't going to the ball girl.

"When I got it, I found them again," he said of the father and son.

Hamilton tossed the ball, right at the father. It was a touch short, and so Shannon Stone, a firefighter from Brownwood, Tex., leaned in front of his 6-year-old son, Cooper, to grab the ball. In an instant, Stone flipped over the railing and fell 20 feet to the concrete pavement below.

Paramedics scrambled to treat him, but Stone, 39, died of his injuries. His son was in the front seat of the ambulance.

"It's like it happened in slow motion," Hamilton, his eyes moist, said as he met reporters before Friday night's game. "Here was a little boy, screaming for his daddy after he had fallen."

Of Stone, Hamilton said: "I saw him just tip over the edge there. It was disbelief." Hamilton said it was all the harder to absorb after he returned home after the game to his own children.

"I can't imagine what they're going through right now," Hamilton said of the Stone family. "All I can think about is just praying for them and that God has a plan and we don't always understand what that plan is, but these things happen."

Such things, it turns out, have happened before at the Texas ballpark.

On April 11, 1994, Hollye Minter was at the inaugural game at the ballpark, outside Fort Worth. While posing for a picture in a section of seats known as Home Run Porch, she toppled over the railing. She fell 35 feet, fracturing several vertebrae, ribs and teeth. The Ranger organization promptly raised the height of the railings in that section of the upper deck.

But in 2010, another fan fell over the railing in another part of the park while reaching for a foul pop, sustaining similar injuries.

"One thing that I learned about myself in all this mess is that God never gives you more than you can handle," Minter told a reporter after the second incident. "So maybe this happened to me so they would raise the rails in Home Run Porch. Maybe this gentleman fell so that the Rangers will now really open their eyes and raise the rails everywhere else, because next time — and I hate to say this — somebody's going to die."

On Friday, Minter, still struggling to absorb the news of Stone's death, said: "Someone said to me, 'Well, it should get their attention now.' I said, 'No, we had their attention in '94 and we had their attention last year.' We got their attention again. I don't know what it's going to take. Maybe if they had made changes last year, that little boy would still have a father. That's what's so tough for me. I have two kids. That little boy, could he ever go to a baseball game again?"

As Stone was mourned at his fire department in Brownwood, the Rangers announced that both teams would wear black ribbons during the game in honor of Stone, that the flags at the ballpark would fly at half-staff and that a moment of silence would be observed before Friday night's game. Grief counselors were made available to players on both the Rangers and the A's. Nolan Ryan, the president of the Rangers, spoke with Stone's widow.

But Ryan said there was no immediate plan to raise the height of the railings throughout the stadium, and no instant ban on players tossing baseballs into the stands. Ryan said the railings had been inspected last year — and again Friday morning — and were determined to meet local safety codes. But he left open the possibility that the issue could be revisited.

"I think what baseball has done is they want to try to make the experience at the ballpark as memorable as possible for our fans and for them to connect as much as they can with our players," Ryan said. "I'm no different than our fan base. When I was younger and went to the ballpark, my hope was to get a foul ball."

Ryan added: "We're about making memories, about family entertainment and last night we had a father and a son at the game and had a very tragic incident. It just drives to the core of what we're about, and the memories we try to make in this game for our fans."

Stone's family issued a statement saying it was devastated and concerned for the welfare of Cooper. Ryan, at the family's request, asked news organizations to refrain from replaying video of the accident.

Stone had served as a firefighter since 1993, according to Del Albright, the fire chief in Brownwood. He had risen to the rank of lieutenant, and in 2008 had received a distinguished service medal for rescuing an elderly woman from a house fire.

"He was very respected by his crew and looked up to by other firemen," Albright said. "I was always very comfortable handing him command. I don't think I ever took over for him. He was a great leader and great firefighter. The only thing that surpassed his love for the fire service was the love for his family and his boy. Cooper was always by his side."

Albright added: "He was trying to get that ball for his boy. I know what was probably going through his mind. That was his No. 1 goal, getting that ball for his boy."

Rangers Manager Ron Washington said he offered Hamilton the option of taking off Friday night, but Hamilton declined. The Rangers held a team meeting Friday afternoon, and Washington said nobody approached him about not playing against Oakland.

"You get on your knees, say your prayers and leave it with a higher power than you," Washington said.

Major League Baseball issued a statement Friday in which it pledged to review the accident, but issued no formal policies for its teams on the practice of tossing balls to the fans as souvenirs.

Hamilton said he would continue to do it occasionally.

"Of course, that's what the game's all about," he said. "Fans come, they pay to see you play, they want to have a good experience at the ballpark, and player interaction is part of that good experience.

"It'll be something that you'll look carefully at — at the situations, where the fans are, how high they are up, what's the railing's like. All these things will come into play now."

River Cats' Miller hits three homers

By Andrew Pentis / Special to MLB.com

Jai Miller probably will not recall striking out on five pitches in his first at-bat Friday night. His final three plate appearances were a lot more memorable.

The A's farmhand launched a trio of solo homers over the final five innings of the Sacramento River Cats' 11-4 road win over the Las Vegas 51s.

"I was very upset with it," Miller said of his first-inning whiff, "but I'm glad I bounced back."

It was the fourth three-homer game in Sacramento history and first since Chris Carter accomplished the feat on Aug. 31, 2009.

Bringing new meaning to the phrase "hitting to all fields," Miller homered to center field in the fifth, left-center in the seventh and right-center in the ninth.

"I was especially happy with going to right, staying on the ball," the right-handed hitter said.

The former fourth-round Draft pick has five homers in seven games this month and a career-best 20 on the season.

"Doing that is great. It's my first time getting there," said Miller, who hit 19 homers for Triple-A Albuquerque in 2008. "My teammates are excited for me because I was able to do it in the first half. It's a great stepping stone, but I don't want to stay here."

The first two shots came off 51s starter Brad Mills (7-7), who gave up seven runs on 10 hits over seven innings.

Was Miller considering a potential third dinger when he stepped into the box against reliever Rommie Lewis?

"No, not all. I was trying to fight that as much as I could," he said.

Batting out of the two-hole as the River Cats' designated hitter, Miller also doubled in the fourth inning to go 4-for-5.

It was his second multi-homer game of the season. He went yard twice and drove in five runs against Reno on April 20.

The 26-year-old, who signed with Oakland as a Minor League free agent last November, also launched three longballs in a game while with Double-A Carolina on July 24, 2007. He drove in seven runs that day.

Miller is in his ninth Minor League season. He appeared in one big league game for Florida in 2008 and 55 more for the Royals last year.

Two more veterans with Major League experience, Kevin Kouzmanoff and Matt Carson, also went deep for the River Cats.

Sacramento starter Travis Banwart allowed three runs over three innings. Graham Godfrey (8-1) pitched four hitless innings to earn the win.

Cardenas is River Cats' renaissance man, hit leader

BY TODD DEWEY, LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

Besides being passionate about baseball, Oakland Athletics prospect Adrian Cardenas also has a passion for learning and the arts.

The 23-year-old Sacramento utilityman combined the latter interests last fall, when he enrolled at New York University to study creative writing.

"I wanted to go to college ever since I was in high school, not only for baseball but just to learn because I liked it," Cardenas said before going 0-for-4 in the River Cats' 11-4 win over the 51s on Friday at Cashman Field. "I felt it did me justice as a person."

Cardenas, who leads Sacramento in batting (.311) and hits (90), put off college after being a 2006 first-round draft pick by the Philadelphia Phillies. When the team made him an attractive offer, he decided to turn pro instead, reasoning he could always go back to school.

"But it got to a point where I felt I needed that kind of stimulation, to be around that environment," he said.

As an NYU freshman, he got A's in his first four classes. He plans to double-major in philosophy, but that might change.

"I like philosophy a lot, but I want to get into film and kind of expressing myself through writing and film as well," Cardenas said. "I like writing fiction, but based on true stuff, expressing my ideas, my beliefs and my philosophies in a fictional way."

Depending on whether he is called up by the Athletics in September, Cardenas plans to return to NYU this fall to continue his studies.

Growing up in Miami, Cardenas was exposed to a wide range of literature, music and movies by his parents, especially his father, Juan, who has huge collections of CDs and films.

"Anywhere from classical music to oriental music to rock, jazz, blues. Anything," he said. "You name it, we have some sort of music from the genre, which is pretty cool.

"It's the same thing with acting and reading. (My father) was always very into it and introduced it to me by default."

As a result, Cardenas has eclectic tastes. His favorite films include the classics "Cool Hand Luke" and "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid." But he also loves a modern French film entitled "Incendie."

"We have a lot of foreign films," he said. "Sometimes that would be my reading assignments. Every time I didn't want to read, (my parents would) tell me, 'You can watch this movie.' I had to read English subtitles for an Italian movie or a French movie.

"That's stuff I didn't appreciate before, but now I do."

Cardenas, who grew up playing the piano, said his favorite composer is Hungarian Franz Liszt. But don't bother dropping Liszt's name on River Cats hitting coach Todd Steverson.

"Some people (Cardenas) likes in music, I never even heard of them," Steverson said. "I'm old-school R&B. I know he ain't there.

"He's an eclectic guy. To be a quote-unquote 'jock' doesn't mean you can't enjoy different parts of culture."

His favorite authors include Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Ayn Rand, but one of his favorite quotes was uttered by Ernest Hemingway: "There's nothing to writing. All you do is sit at a typewriter and bleed."

The same often can be said of baseball, Cardenas said.

"The ups and downs are very similar," he said. "As a hitter, (Wednesday) I went 4-for-4, but (Thursday) I went 0-for-4. It's the same thing in writing, if you write every day.

"Some days I feel I'm on top of it. I'm in complete control. But most days I feel like I'm writing in a foreign language."

RockHounds held to 2 hits in loss

Midland Reporter-Telegram

NORTH LITTLE ROCK, Ark. -- Arkansas Travelers pitcher Matt Shoemaker threw his second complete game shutout of the season, holding the Midland RockHounds to two hits in a 5-0 victory for the Travelers at Dickey-Stephens Park on Friday.

Shoemaker allowed just four RockHounds to reach base, surrendering two walks while striking out five batters in nine innings of work. Adam Heether and Shane Peterson each had a single for the RockHounds two hits of the ballgame.

Meanwhile, the Travelers, playing their first game without top Los Angeles Angels prospect Mike Trout in the lineup after he was called up to the majors on Friday, managed five runs on 10 hits.

Right fielder Angel Castillo doubled in designated hitter Roberto Lopez for the game's first run in the second inning, then made it 2-0 in favor of Arkansas when he scored on a single by center fielder Clay Fuller.

Two more came across for Arkansas in the fourth when first baseman Gabe Jacobo scored on a fielder's choice ball hit by Fuller. Castillo made it 4-0 after hitting his second double of the game earlier in the inning and scoring on an Alberto Rosario single.

Jacobo knocked in another run with a single in the eighth, bringing in left fielder Chris Pettit.

A.J. Griffin took the loss for Midland, allowing four runs -- all earned -- on eight hits and a walk with two strikeouts in 5 2/3 innings.

The RockHounds attempt to avoid a series sweep at 7:10 p.m. today when they face Arkansas in the final game of a three-game series at Dickey-Stephens Park.

Straily Spins a Win for Ports

Stockton Ports

After a brutal loss in the series opener against the Modesto Nuts, the Stockton Ports are back on track with a 2-1 win on Friday night. It wasn't a big offensive night for either team, as Ports starter Dan Straily and Nuts starter Chad Bettis both pitched tremendously, Stockton just coming out ahead in the low-scoring affair.

The Ports would get on the board first when, with two outs in the first, designated hitter and Cal League home run leader Michael Choice drove home run number 23 to deep center field.

Stockton would put another run up in the second. Right fielder Rashun Dixon led off with a single, followed by a walk drawn by left fielder Mitch LeVier. Catcher Ryan Lipkin grounded into a fielder's choice, but a throwing error on the double-play attempt would allow Dixon to score and Lipkin to be safe at first.

Modesto would cut off Stockton's offensive streak in the third. Bettis got his first 1-2-3 inning of the game, the first out coming on an outstanding barehanded play by third baseman Nolan Arenado. Bettis would strike out his next two batters to end the inning, and would go on to strike out eight in a row, 11 total on the night.

Straily had a fantastic outing as well. Straily faced the minimum three batters in his first four innings of work, giving up just one run on a home run by right fielder Kent Matthes in the fifth. Straily would hit his next batter, but then go on to strike out two and draw a pop-out to end the inning with no further damage. He would face the minimum again in his last two innings, and finish out the night allowing just four hits and striking out eight.

After matching his season high of 11 strike outs in seven innings, Bettis would give way to Will Harris on the mound for the Nuts. Harris pitched a perfect inning to bring Modesto to the plate in the ninth.

The Nuts would face closer Josh Lansford in the final inning. Lansford would draw ground outs for the first two outs. Matthes came to bat and popped up into foul territory, catcher Ryan Lipkin making a sliding catch for the final out of the game.

The Ports look to string two wins together tomorrow when righty Murphy Smith faces off against Nuts pitcher Parker Frazier at 7:05 p.m.

River Bandits Fight Back For Extra Innings Win

By Matthew Wheaton, Burlington Bees

BURLINGTON, IA- The Burlington Bees (6-9) lost to the Quad Cities River Bandits (7-8) by a score of 7-5 in ten innings in front of 1,041 fans at Community Field Friday night. The River Bandits started the scoring in the top of the first inning after

RF Michael Swinson (2-3) hit a one-out single to right field. A wild pitch sent Swinson to second base. An RBI single to right field by LF Oscar Taveras (2-6) scored Swinson. 1B Jonathan Rodriguez (0-3) walked. Taveras advanced to third base and Rodriguez to second base on a wild pitch thrown by Burlington RHP Tyler Vail with DH Chris Edmondson (0-5) at the plate. A RBI ground out from Edmondson scored Taveras to put the River Bandits up 2-0. After a one-out triple to right field by Bees 2B Nino Leyja (1-5) in the bottom of the first inning, 3B Tony Thompson (1-5) had a RBI ground out to make the score 2-1. Burlington DH A.J. Kirby-Jones (2-3) drew a leadoff walk in the bottom of the second inning. A single to right field from SS Yordy Cabrera (2-4) moved Kirby-Jones to second base. LF Royce Consigli (1-4) hit a single to center field, advancing Cabrera and Kirby-Jones. With Jose Crisotomo (0-3) at the plate, Kirby-Jones scored on a passed ball by River Bandits C Geoff Klein (2-4) to tie the game at 2-2. Klein singled to left field to start off the top of the fourth inning, and eventually scored from third base on a sacrifice fly to left field from Swinson to put the River Bandits up 3-2. In the bottom of the sixth inning, Burlington 1B Josh Whitaker (1-4) hit a solo home run to right field and Kirby-Jones hit a solo home run to left field to give the Bees a 4-3 lead. Klein walked to start off the top of the eighth inning, and later scored on a double to center field by Swinson to make the score 4-4. In the top of the tenth inning, River Bandits SS Packy Elkins (1-2) drew a two-out walk and Ronny Gil pinch-ran for him. 2B Kolten Wong (1-5) hit a double. Swinson reached first base on an error, which scored Gil and Wong. An RBI double to center field from Taveras put the River Bandits up 7-4. Thompson smacked a solo home run over the left field wall in the bottom of the tenth inning to make the score 7-5. RHP Pedro Vidal allowed four runs on three hits, walked two and struck out two in 3.1 innings and was credited with the loss. RHP Jonathan Joseph finished the game by throwing the final 1/3 of an inning. The Bees begin a three-game series with the Kane County Cougars on Saturday at 6:00 p.m. at Elfstrom Stadium in Geneva, Ill. RHP Yordano Ventura (2-3, 4.89) gets the start for the Cougars against RHP Sean Murphy (0-2, 7.56) for the Bees.

Lake Monsters Rained Out On Friday

By Paul Stanfield / Vermont Lake Monsters

BROOKLYN, NY --- Friday night's New York-Penn League game between the Vermont Lake Monsters and Brooklyn Cyclones at MCU Park was postponed due to rain. The game will be made up as part of a doubleheader starting at 1:05 pm on Sunday, July 31st when Brooklyn visits Vermont for a now four-game series July 30-August 1st at historic Centennial Field. Vermont, winners of eight of its last 10 games, leads the Stedler Division with a 13-6 record and return home to Centennial to begin a three-game homestand against Staten Island on Saturday. The McNamara Division-leading Yankees are off to a 17-3 start to the 2011 season, including three straight victories and are 16-1 in last 17 games after losing two of their first three games.

The series with Staten Island begins on Saturday with first pitch at 6:05 pm. The series continues Sunday at 1:05 pm with an appearance at the ballpark by former professional wrestler Brutus "The Barber" Beefcake. The three-game series between the two division leaders concludes on Monday at 7:05 pm. Monday is also the first of two "Hot Dog Heaven" nights at Centennial this summer with 25-cent hot dogs on sale all night.