

Sizemore's offense not a good sign for Kouzmanoff

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

ARLINGTON, Texas -- Kevin Kouzmanoff is pushing for a return to the major leagues based on his stats with Triple-A Sacramento.

But Kouzmanoff, who began the season as the A's starting third baseman, likely will need patience.

Scott Sizemore is growing roots at the position since the A's recalled him from the minors June 6.

Sizemore was primarily a second baseman when he was acquired from Detroit on May 27 for reliever David Purcey. But he's making the adjustment to third and has been the rare bright spot offensively for Oakland.

"He's gone from a guy who's the new guy here -- we weren't sure if he would be able to play the position -- to a guy we really count on every day," manager Bob Melvin said.

Sizemore is hitting .300 in 27 games. His four homers lead the team over that span, and his 14 RBIs are tied with Hideki Matsui for the lead.

That run production nearly matches what Kouzmanoff had given the A's at the time he was sent down June 6, when he was batting .221 with four homers and 17 RBIs through 46 games.

Kouzmanoff, making \$4.75 million this season, has found his groove for Sacramento. Entering Saturday night's game at Las Vegas, he was hitting .311 with six homers and 29 RBIs in 25 games, with two errors defensively.

But it's tough imagining anyone uprooting Sizemore right now. Plus, Kouzmanoff is not on the 40-man roster.

Melvin has a unique perspective on Derek Jeter reaching 3,000 career hits. Melvin was teammates with the New York Yankees shortstop when both were with the Triple-A Columbus Clippers in 1995, Melvin's final season as a player.

Also on that club: pitchers Andy Pettitte and Mariano Rivera and catcher Jorge Posada.

"They all came up together and succeeded together, and that's why the expectation level in New York is always to win the World Series," Melvin said. "(Jeter) embodies that."

Left-hander Brett Anderson, sidelined with an elbow injury, was in the A's clubhouse before the game and said there's no timetable for him to start throwing. He received a platelet-rich plasma injection June 13. That was to be followed by six weeks of rehab, which would take him into the last week of July.

Oakland A's lose to Texas Rangers on Josh Hamilton's homer in ninth

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

ARLINGTON, Texas -- Perhaps it was baseball destiny that a routine grounder found no man's land on the right side of the A's infield Saturday night, allowing Josh Hamilton to bat in the bottom of the ninth.

Hamilton's two-out, two-run homer off Andrew Bailey provided a storybook ending for the Texas Rangers left fielder, the center of so much drama in recent days.

It was nothing short of a nightmare for the A's, left to digest a 7-6 gut-wrenching loss.

Hamilton ripped a 2-0 fastball from Bailey that made a beeline for the upper deck in right-center field. That sent the A's to their third straight defeat in a four-game series that might polish off their chances in the American League West.

"Coming into this series, we had high hopes of winning three of four, or even sweeping them and going into the (All-Star) break and getting right back in the division," Bailey said. "You lose the first two, and you're in position to win that one. You've got to get the job done, and I just didn't."

Euphoria surrounded Hamilton as he crossed home plate.

On Thursday night, he tossed a ball into the stands to Rangers fan Shannon Stone, who flipped over a railing while catching the ball and died from injuries suffered in his 20-foot fall.

Hamilton returned to the lineup Friday night. On Saturday, he went 4 for 5 with two doubles and three RBIs, including his second career walkoff blast.

"It's been obviously an up-and-down, roller-coaster, emotional type of weekend," Hamilton said. "Everything that happened to Mr. Stone and the Stone family, obviously I'm still thinking about them, praying for them and grieving about the whole situation.

"Then for something like that to happen tonight, it takes you from one extreme to the other pretty quick."

The events leading to Hamilton's homer were maddening for the A's.

Bailey (0-2) got the first two outs of the ninth and got Elvis Andrus to ground a ball to the right side. First baseman Conor Jackson broke for the ball before realizing second baseman Jemile Weeks would get to it.

Jackson scrambled to cover the bag, but Weeks' throw was wide. Jackson turned and couldn't catch the ball, and Andrus plowed into him. Jackson was down for several minutes while being attended to.

He was in pain after the game, saying his ribs and back hurt.

"I realized it was Weeks' ball and (ran for the bag)," Jackson said. "I saw Bailey, but I was not sure if he was going to get there."

The mix-up on Andrus' grounder, which was scored a hit, capped a shaky night for the A's defensively.

Weeks was charged with an error when he couldn't get a handle on a ball hit by Endy Chavez that was deflected by first baseman Chris Carter in the fifth.

A generous scoring decision prevented Weeks from being charged with another error in the second, when Mitch Moreland's sharp grounder ricocheted off Weeks' knee.

The A's batted around in a four-run second off Colby Lewis. Josh Willingham homered in the inning.

But right-hander Brandon McCarthy couldn't hold a 5-1 lead in the fifth, when Texas scored four times to tie it. He allowed five runs in six innings.

The A's are 11 games behind first-place Texas with Sunday's game left before the All-Star break.

"You don't want to go into the break having been swept four games and have to sit on that," A's manager Bob Melvin said.

Chin Music: A's look to turn tide against Rangers

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 7/9/2011 4:16pm

Tonight's lineups, as the A's try to find the win column in Arlington:

A's — Weeks 2B, Crisp CF, Matsui LF, Willingham DH, Sizemore 3B, DeJesus RF, Carter 1B, Powell C, Pennington SS; McCarthy RHP.

Rangers — Kinsler 2B, Andrus SS, Hamilton LF, Beltre DH, Young 3B, Cruz RF, Moreland 1B, Torrealba C, Chavez CF, Lewis RHP.

—This marks the second straight game that Josh Willingham serves as DH. He told me before batting practice that he's feeling fine physically, and A's manager Bob Melvin said Willingham would be back in left field Sunday.

–Notable stats involving tonight's starting pitchers: Adrian Beltre is 6 for 17 (.353) with one homer lifetime against the A's Brandon McCarthy. Hideki Matsui, who has been stuck on 499 career professional homers for 18 games now, is 6 for 16 (.375) with two homers against the Rangers' Colby Lewis.

Josh Hamilton's homer in 9th snatches win from A's

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland did not want this final series before the All-Star break, against the division-leading Rangers no less, to go this way. And Saturday's loss, the A's third in a row here, was particularly tough.

The A's led going into the ninth inning, and with two outs, closer Andrew Bailey got the kind of groundball he wanted, a bouncer to the right side by Elvis Andrus, but Andrus wound up safe on the in-betweeners. The next batter, All-Star Josh Hamilton, belted a homer into the second deck in right to give Texas a 7-6 victory.

"It's really rough," said Bailey, who fell behind Hamilton 2-0 before throwing him a fastball. "Coming in, we had high hopes of getting right back into it. I've got to get the job done, and I just didn't."

Oakland wanted to take three or even four games in order to climb back into the race before the break. Instead, the A's are a season-high 13 games below .500 and 11 games back in the AL West. Today is the series finale, with Trevor Cahill going against Texas left-hander Matt Harrison.

"We certainly don't want to get swept four games going into the break and have to sit on that," A's manager Bob Melvin said.

Coco Crisp had given the A's the lead with a solo homer off Tommy Hunter in the seventh, and the Oakland bullpen had converted its past 10 save opportunities dating back to June 10. Bailey had saved eight in a row since blowing his first opportunity after coming off the disabled list in late May.

The closer has only nine blown saves in his two-plus big-league seasons, and four of them have come in Texas.

Bailey, though, did get that two-out grounder, but then things broke down. First baseman Conor Jackson started toward the ball, then reversed back toward the base as Jemile Weeks made the play. Jackson and Andrus arrived at the bag at the same time and Andrus flattened Jackson, who was stretching out trying to catch the throw.

Jackson, who took a knee to the ribcage, got up and was OK, but Andrus was safe.

"Conor has to make the decision if he can get back in time, and they were both there at the same time," Melvin said. "It was one of those in-between ones."

"It was just in kind of a tough place for a groundball," Bailey said. "But it all boils down to throwing strikes and getting ahead of Hamilton."

The A's had scored only 10 runs total in their previous five games, so Saturday's six runs counted as an outburst. Josh Willingham started things with a solo homer off Colby Lewis in the second, and the A's went on to score four in the inning, with one coming in on a catcher's interference call on Yorvit Torrealba.

The Rangers scored five runs off A's starter Brandon McCarthy, who gave up four to his former team in the fifth, including a homer to Adrian Beltre, who almost fell over backward with the force of his swing.

"It was a curveball, and I thought it wasn't bad in the situation, but he went down for it," McCarthy said. "He killed it."

The last-place A's, disappointed with outcomes in Texas so far, now must regroup at a ballpark where they have dropped four of five overall this season.

"It's pretty bad, especially coming in here with a team we have to start making a statement against," McCarthy said. "This is the team on top right now, and we'd like to come in and start pushing them around."

A's Hideki Matsui lauds Derek Jeter for milestone

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Hideki Matsui called Yankees shortstop **Derek Jeter** "the best teammate I've ever had" on Saturday, and Matsui was pleased that his old friend recorded his 3,000th hit - and did it with a home run.

"It's amazing what he's achieved and to accomplish it with a home run - well, it kind of resembles him," Matsui said through translator **Roger Kahlon**. "I don't think he's conscious of doing it, but he just has a flair for the dramatic."

Matsui has been stuck in his own quest for a round number - he's at 499 home runs combined in Japan and the major leagues - and he's been there for 19 games since June 16.

Oakland's **Cliff Pennington** is a shortstop, and like Jeter, he wears No. 2. He calls himself a "big-time" fan of Jeter's. "It's an awesome milestone," Pennington said.

Manager **Bob Melvin** played on a star-studded Triple-A Columbus team with Jeter in 1995, and Melvin said that No. 3,000 was done "in typical Jeter fashion."

Carter's day: First baseman **Chris Carter**, whose roster spot might be up in the air after the break, went 0-for-3 with two strikeouts, and he failed to catch a foul ball down the first base line in the Rangers' four-run fifth. After the game, Melvin noted that Carter did not have as far to go to make the play as second baseman **Jemile Weeks**.

Conor Jackson replaced Carter at first the next inning, but Melvin noted that he's done that before and said it was based on a number of variables. Jackson then ended an 0-for-18 slide at the plate with a double in the eighth.

Briefly: In the eighth, **Scott Sizemore** stretched high for a foul ball by **Mitch Moreland** in front of the stands near third, caught it, then toppled into the crowd. ... Weeks leaped for a liner by Moreland to end the fourth and combined with Pennington on a snappy forceout to end the seventh.

A's Leading off

In the minors: First baseman Daric Barton, sent down to get his swing together, is batting .149 at Triple-A Sacramento. Kevin Kouzmanoff, batting .324 for Sacramento, could be a target for the Yankees, who need a backup third baseman.

Drumbeat: A's Matsui is happy for his friend Derek Jeter; pregame tidbits

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Rangers Ballpark, 7/9/2011 4:22pm

Several of the A's were watching the televised hooplah over Derek Jeter's 3,000th hit this afternoon - Landon Powell was even quizzing some teammates about the all-time list of men with 3K hits - but no one was more excited about Jeter's accomplishment than his longtime Yankees teammate Hideki Matsui.

"It's amazing what he's achieved," Matsui said through translator Roger Kahlon. "And to do it with a home run - that kind of resembles him."

Matsui told me that Jeter is the best teammate he's ever had, but he said he's not planning to call or text Jeter today. "He'll be getting too many texts and calls from his girlfriends," Matsui said with a big grin.

Matsui is sitting on 499 career homers between Japan and the major leagues, but he doesn't consider a combo-500 homers a real milestone because he believes the numbers should be considered separately. Still, he does get asked by the Japanese media about No. 500 every day, and he said Jeter was luckier in a way - he needed just one hit and he got a homer. Matsui, though, has to hit one out to get his round number.

Matsui is in left field today and Josh Willingham is the DH for the second night in a row. Willingham is fine, manager Bob Melvin said. He has no remaining issues with that Achilles tendinitis.

Here's the lineup: Weeks 2b, Crisp cf, Matsui lf, Willingham dh, Sizemore 3b, DeJesus rf, Carter 1b, Powell c, Pennington ss. Brandon McCarthy is on the mound for Oakland tonight against his former team.

Conor Jackson is 0 for his past 18, but that's not why he's not in the lineup - everyone is getting at least one day off during the four-game series in the Texas heat. Melvin said he believes Jackson is trying too hard - he's used to driving in runs, he's not having success doing that right now, so he's thinking too much.

It won't be 105 degrees at game time again tonight; it's a little overcast, cooling things off to a mere 99.

Catcher Kurt Suzuki said last night was the first time he can remember the heat really affecting him. He said he was a little dehydrated, but more than anything, he felt as if his blood sugar was low. He's getting tonight off, as planned.

SHEA HEY

Dick Williams never made 1 team his own

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

The A's retired the numbers of **Catfish Hunter**, **Rollie Fingers**, **Reggie Jackson**, **Dennis Eckersley** and **Rickey Henderson**, all Hall of Famers.

Dick Williams, who died Thursday at 82, made it to the Hall of Fame, but his No. 23 isn't painted on those upper-deck tarps at the Coliseum along with 27, 34, 9, 43 and 24.

While Williams managed three of the most memorable seasons in Oakland history, featuring championships in 1972 and 1973, those were his only years with the A's.

Though he also guided the Red Sox and Padres to the World Series, he didn't stay in any of his six gigs long enough to be associated with just one franchise — like **Joe Torre** with the Yankees and **Bobby Cox** with the Braves. It's telling he went into the Hall as an Athletic (despite being a shorttimer) and didn't get his number retired by any team. Except, that is, the Fort Worth Cats, for whom no one ever again will wear No. 5.

Williams never realized his dream of managing the Yankees, though he secretly negotiated with **George Steinbrenner's** people while still managing in Oakland, an obvious act of tampering. He resigned after the '73 Series and was introduced as the Yanks' manager, but A's owner **Charlie Finley** refused to let him out of his contract.

Much was made of Finley's "firing" of infielder **Mike Andrews** in the '73 Series as the reason Williams left Oakland, but he wanted out long before that, especially with the Yankees on deck.

If Williams had made it to New York, could he have stuck long term? Here's your answer: **Billy Martin**, who began his first of five Yankee stints in '75. In another word, doubtful.

THE BULL PEN

By John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

Adam Dunn finally got his second hit against a left-hander on Monday, earning a standing ovation in Chicago, and found himself in Wednesday's lineup against Royals lefty **Bruce Chen**. Did manager

Ozzie Guillen have newfound confidence in Dunn? "Have you seen Bruce Chen pitch?" asked Guillen. "I might get an at-bat." Dunn went hitless — he's 2for-59 off lefties — and Chen beat the Sox 4-1.

Dismayed by **Chone Figgins'** struggles, the Mariners called up **Kyle Seager**, their third-round pick in 2009. Their top pick that year was **Dustin Ackley**. Both out of North Carolina, where Ackley played first and Seager second. With Seattle, Ackley plays second and Seager third.

Jason Kendall, **Kurt Suzuki's** old mentor and the catcher on Oakland's 2006 ALCS team, apparently is done. He's 37 and will undergo a second rotator-cuff surgery Wednesday, shelving him through 2012. He has made 1,990 starts, ranking him fourth in history among catchers.

Last year at this time, **Daric Barton** was considered the majors' best defensive first baseman, at least according to Baseball Info Solutions' runs saved metric. Now it's **Todd Helton**, left.

On its midseason All-Star team, the site lists Angels in two of three outfield spots: **Peter Bourjos** and **Torii Hunter**.

No A's or Giants.

With 43 straight sellouts, the Giants have nothing on the Dayton Dragons of the Class A Midwest League, who sold out Saturday's game against the South Bend Silver Hawks, their 815th straight sellout, a North American pro sports record — eclipsing the 1977-95 Portland Trail Blazers.

Bill Walton was unavailable for comment.

Bailey surrenders first homer as A's fall

Closer blows save after Andrus' hit keeps Rangers alive

By Todd Wills / Special to MLB.com

ARLINGTON -- Andrew Bailey leaned against a chair in the A's clubhouse after an excruciating 7-6 loss to the Rangers on Saturday and pretty much told it like it was.

Against a great hitter, you have to get ahead in the count, especially with a one-run lead, one out from a much-needed victory.

Instead, Bailey started Rangers slugger Josh Hamilton with two balls. The next pitch was a fastball, and Hamilton crushed Bailey's offering into the second deck at Rangers Ballpark in Arlington for a two-run walk-off home run, handing the A's a gut-wrenching loss to the American League West division leaders.

It was a storybook ending for Hamilton, who on Thursday tossed a ball into the stands toward a Texas firefighter who tumbled over the railing in front of him and fell about 20 feet to concrete below. The man, Shannon Stone, died from injuries sustained during the fall.

For the A's, who also have had an emotional three days, it was a brutal loss that dropped them to 39-52 on the season and 11 games out of first place.

"You can't fall behind that guy 2-0," Bailey said. "Obviously, he's one of the best players in the game. You just can't put yourself in that position. Obviously, he's looking fastball, and I'm just looking to get back in the count. He put a good swing on it, and we lost."

Bailey got the first two outs of the bottom of the ninth easily, getting Endy Chavez to ground out to third and Ian Kinsler to fly out to center. A pivotal moment came next.

Rangers shortstop Elvis Andrus hit a grounder into the hole between first and second base. First baseman Conor Jackson started for the ball but retreated to first as second baseman Jemile Weeks got to the ball. Weeks then made a throw that appeared to have too much air under it, and Jackson couldn't come up with the errant toss. To make matters worse, Andrus crashed into Jackson, who was examined by team trainers before staying in the game.

"I hit it in the right spot," said Andrus, who was credited with a single. "I bust myself as hard as I can to get to first base. If Weeks made a good throw, that wouldn't even have been a close play."

A's manager Bob Melvin was reluctant to criticize Weeks after the game, even though replays showed he had a chance to get Andrus with a stronger throw.

"It was just one of those in-between plays," Melvin said. "I haven't had a chance [to see a replay]."

Whatever the case, it brought up Hamilton, the reigning AL MVP, who hit the second walk-off homer of his career. Hamilton's drive sailed 435 feet into the home run porch in right field.

"He's like he always is," Melvin said.

Before Hamilton's dramatics, it seemed that Coco Crisp would be the hero of the night. His solo home run on a 2-0 pitch from Rangers reliever Tommy Hunter in the top of the seventh gave the A's a 6-5 lead. It was Crisp's first road home run of the season.

"[Coco] has a lot of experience," Melvin said. "He's faced a lot of pitchers. He knows how to set up guys to an extent. He's a smart hitter, and he hits good pitching."

Melvin said before Saturday's penultimate game before the All-Star break that the A's have to find a way to score more runs if they're going to get back in the AL West.

The A's jumped to a 4-0 lead in the top of the second inning. Josh Willingham, playing in his third game since coming off the disabled list, started the inning with a home run to left field. David DeJesus walked with one out, and after Chris Carter flied out to left, Landon Powell singles to right to keep the inning alive.

Cliff Pennington and Weeks had RBI singles to right field for a 3-0 lead. Hideki Matsui then reached on catcher's interference with the bases loaded to force in another run. Matsui was credited with an RBI.

A's right-hander Brandon McCarthy allowed a run in the bottom of the second on an RBI double by Rangers catcher Yorvit Torrealba. But the A's got the run back in the top of the fifth on Scott Sizemore's single for a 5-1 lead.

McCarthy, a former Ranger, couldn't hold the lead. He allowed a four-run fifth inning, giving up four hits, the big blow a solo home run by Adrian Beltre to tie the game at 5.

McCarthy only threw 87 pitches, but Melvin said he tired during the long fifth inning. McCarthy is now winless in his last nine starts.

"I feel like they squared a lot of balls up tonight," McCarthy said, "some for outs, some for hits. I know they're a good hitting team, but I need to go back to the video and to see what exactly happened. I need to do a better job of eliminating what happened there in the fifth."

The A's have a game before the All-Star break to turn things around -- they have lost eight of their past 11 games.

Saturday's loss, though, was a tough one to get over.

"Obviously, it's real rough," Bailey said. "You come into this series with high hopes of winning three out of four or sweeping them going into the break and right back in the division. You lose the first two, and you're in position to win the third one. I've got to get the job done, and I just didn't."

Sizemore showing he belongs in big leagues

By Todd Wills / Special to MLB.com

ARLINGTON -- Scott Sizemore has been a pleasant surprise for the A's since taking over at third base after he was called up from Triple-A Sacramento on June 6.

Sizemore, who primarily played second base with the Tigers, has improved steadily at third. More important, he's hit well while learning a new position and made a nice play in a 7-6 loss on Saturday when he leaped into the stands to snare a foul ball.

Sizemore finished Saturday with 10 hits in his past 32 at-bats. He had three home runs, six RBIs and four multi-hit games, as he flashed the offensive ability that made him a heralded prospect in the Tigers' system.

Sizemore, who was traded from the Tigers to the A's on May 27, is learning where to position himself at third, manager Bob Melvin said.

"The more comfortable he gets, there more entrenched he'll get there," Melvin said. "It's difficult to give him a day off because he's been an offensive force for us. Now, he's hitting in the middle of the lineup. He's gone from the new guy here, not sure he'd be able to play the position, to a guy we count on every day."

Slumping Jackson given day off

ARLINGTON -- Conor Jackson received a day off Saturday, though it may not have felt much like it.

Jackson, entered as a defensive substitution in the sixth inning and doubled in the eighth for his first hit in 19 at-bats, avoiding tying a career-worst stretch. But Jackson was involved in a collision with Elvis Andrus at first base in the ninth inning and was visited by team trainers but remained in the game.

Manager Bob Melvin said before the game that it was time for Jackson to get some time off. He hadn't hit for much power -- Jackson cracked his second homer on Sunday to end a 49-game drought -- and he had only 22 RBIs in 69 games. Jackson has driven in at least 75 runs twice in his career.

"He's just trying a little too hard right now," Melvin said. "He's been up in some situations where there's been some runners on base, and in the past that's where he's really thrived is in RBI situations. To an extent, he's struggling a little bit and everybody goes through it during the course of a season."

Melvin, Jackson's manager for five seasons in Arizona from 2005-09, said it's more a mental thing than a physical one for the outfielder.

"He keeps himself in great shape," Melvin said. "He's ready to play every day, but sometimes it's just a little bit of a mental grind for a guy that's used to driving in some runs. Recently, he has been in a little bit of a funk offensively."

Looking for swing, Carter gets another start

ARLINGTON -- Chris Carter was in the A's lineup for the eighth time in 10 games Saturday against the Rangers and continues to adjust to Major League pitching, though he exited in the sixth inning in favor of a defensive substitution.

Carter finished the day with four hits in his 28 at-bats this season and he has struck out in nine consecutive games. He had 13 strikeouts, fanning almost half the time. The 6-foot-4, 244-pound first baseman said it has been an adjustment since being called up on June 23 from Triple-A Sacramento.

"I'm still trying to find my swing," Carter said, "and trying to get used to things."

A's manager Bob Melvin, who took over as manager just before Carter arrived, sees a lot of potential in the 24-year-old.

"The ability is there," Melvin said. "It's more about him just getting comfortable, having some results, having some success and building off of that."

Worth noting

- Josh Willingham was the A's designated hitter for the third straight game after coming off the disabled list, but manager Bob Melvin said the outfielder is doing fine physically. Willingham will start in left field on Sunday.

- Melvin played with Derek Jeter for Triple-A Columbus in 1995 before the current captain of the Yankees reached the Majors. Melvin said Saturday it was no surprise that the All-Star shortstop notched his 3,000th hit in dramatic fashion with a home run.

"He did it in typical Jeter fashion," Melvin said. "He embodies that winning type of player."

- The A's committed their 71st error on Saturday, the second most in the American League to their current opponent, the Rangers, who have made 72.

Rangers go for seventh straight in first-half finale

By Cash Kruth / MLB.com

Matt Harrison is having the type of season he envisioned himself having in Spring Training, Rangers manager Ron Washington says. Although Oakland's Trevor Cahill hasn't been as dominant in 2011 as he was last season, the A's right-hander is no slouch.

In Sunday's first-half finale, both pitchers look to head into the All-Star break on a high note.

Harrison has been pitching well of late, posting a 2.36 ERA in his last eight starts. Although Harrison only has a 3-3 record to show for it, Washington has been impressed with the 25-year-old.

"He's showing maturity, he's showing belief in himself, and I think everything that is happening for Harry is happening because Harry wants it to happen," Washington said. "He's learned how to stop things from snowballing, so I guess through all of that you can say Harry's maturing into a young pitcher with a bright future."

Cahill seems to have fully rebounded from a five-game stretch between May and June in which he posted a 7.43 ERA and did not make it out of the fourth inning in two outings. In four starts since, Cahill had one hiccup -- a 4 2/3-inning performance -- but has otherwise been back to normal.

He took a no-decision in his last outing against Seattle's Felix Hernandez, allowing two runs (one earned) in seven innings.

"It's always fun going up against the best in the league," Cahill said afterward. "It makes you know you're going to have to be real sharp and that one run here or there could hurt you and get you the loss."

Cahill has dominated the Rangers this season -- allowing one run in 14 innings -- and in his career, going 8-2 with a 2.18 ERA in 11 starts.

Athletics: Carter trying to find himself

- Chris Carter started at first base on Saturday, going 0-for-3 with two strikeouts. Carter has only four hits in 28 at-bats this season and admitted he is still trying to find his swing after his June 23 promotion. Manager Bob Melvin said he is confident Carter will.
- Ryan Sweeney has a 164-game errorless streak, one shy of Jermaine Dye's club mark for an outfielder.

Rangers: Going streaking

- Saturday's win was the Rangers' sixth straight, and they have outscored opponents, 51-22, in that span. The victory also put the Rangers a season-best nine games above .500. Not all streaks made it out of Saturday's game alive, however, as Texas saw its five-game errorless streak end in the second inning.
- Infielder Andres Blanco, who on Friday was placed on the disabled list, said his back injury is actually a bone bruise, not the stress reaction originally thought. Blanco said the pain has been bothering him for about a week, but only when he swings.

Worth noting

- Harrison is 3-1 with a 4.81 in seven games (four starts) against the A's.
- The Rangers lead the season series, 5-4.
- Texas' Michael Young has a seven-game hitting streak in which he's batting .481 (13-for-27) with five RBIs.

Hamilton's HR beats A's in 9th

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ARLINGTON, Texas — Oakland relievers Joey Devine and Grant Balfour pitched two shutout innings, handing normally reliable closer Andrew Bailey a ninth-inning lead.

Bailey got the first two outs in the ninth, and it appeared the Athletics were about to beat the AL West-leading Texas Rangers after losing the first two of the four-game series. Then, Josh Hamilton changed all that.

The reigning AL MVP hit a game-ending, two-run homer to give Texas a 7-6 victory, stretching the Rangers' winning streak to six games and leaving Oakland a season-worst 11 games off the pace in the division. He connected on a 2-0 fastball from Bailey (0-2), a 435-foot blast into the upper deck in right field. It was Hamilton's fourth hit of the game, and his 11th homer of the season.

"You've got to get ahead," said Bailey, who'd converted eight of his first nine save opportunities. "You can't fall behind to that guy 2-0. He's one of the best players in the game. You can't put yourself in that position. He's looking fastball, he put a good swing on it and we lost. You've got to tip your cap to him, come out and get him out tomorrow."

The winning homer came during an emotional stretch for Hamilton, who two nights earlier tossed a ball into the stands toward a Brownwood firefighter who tumbled over the rail and fell about 20 feet to concrete below. The man died less than an hour after the fall.

Flags remained at half-staff and players on both teams again wore black ribbons two nights after Shannon Stone's fatal fall during the opener of the four-game series, when he was at the game with his 6-year-old son. Stone's funeral is Monday.

Elvis Andrus kept the inning alive with an infield single, setting up Hamilton's winner. Andrus had hit what appeared to be a game-ending grounder, but second baseman Jemile Weeks' soft throw was a bit late and wide to first baseman Conor Jackson.

When Jackson reached out to try to catch the ball, the speedy Andrus collided with him and both players fell.

The grounder was between Weeks and Jackson. Jackson made a move for the ball, then retreated to first. Bailey also ran over to cover, and Andrus beat Weeks' throw.

"As soon as Conor goes after it, Bailey does the right thing, to go over and cover," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "Conor has to decide whether he could get back in time, and they were both there at the same time. It was just one of those in-between plays."

Hamilton took a big swing and knew it was gone. He walked a couple of steps, put his head down and started the trot that ended with him being mobbed at home plate by his teammates.

Things are going badly for the A's, 5-12 in their last 17 games after a season-best six-game winning streak.

They led or were tied the entire game until Hamilton's heroics.

"We had it set up for our bullpen, seven, eight, nine," Melvin said. "It just didn't work out."

Coco Crisp and Josh Willingham homered for Oakland (39-52), which fell a season-worst 13-games under .500.

Crisp's fourth homer, a solo shot in the seventh off reliever Tommy Hunter, had given the A's a 6-5 lead.

Both starting pitchers — Oakland's Brandon McCarthy and Rangers right-hander Colby Lewis — allowed five runs over six innings.

Oakland went ahead with a four-run second, the final run coming home when Hideki Matsui reached on catcher's interference with the bases loaded. Matsui hit what appeared to be an inning-ending infield popup, but home plate umpire Eric Cooper immediately signaled the play dead and catcher Yorvit Torrealba tapped his chest protector as if to acknowledge his mistake.

Willingham led off the second with his 11th homer before Cliff Pennington and Weeks had consecutive RBI singles.

Now the A's find themselves trying to avoid a four-game sweep in Sunday's series finale.

"It puts that much more importance on winning tomorrow," Melvin said. "You don't want to get swept four games going into the (All-Star) break. You don't want to sit on that."

Notes: Oakland 3B Scott Sizemore made a nifty grab in the eighth, reaching high over his head and leaning over the wall to catch a foul ball. ... The A's are 16-31 on the road. ... Four of Willingham's 11 homers have come against Texas.

Gutierrez: Time to throw in towel on A's season?

Paul Gutierrez, CSNCalifornia.com

Random observations from the A's gut-wrenching 7-6 walk-off loss to the Texas Rangers Saturday night at Rangers Ballpark in Arlington...

-- Well, that should just about do it for the A's in 2011. Any hopes they had of making some noise in the second half of the season seemed to fly out of the yard with Josh Hamilton's spirit-crushing walk-off job into the upper deck with two out in the ninth, right? Stranger things have happened -- paging the 1995 *California* Angels, who squandered the 12 1/2-game lead they enjoyed over Seattle on Aug. 15 of that strike-shortened season. These A's, though, may have had the wind permanently taken out of their sails -- at least for 2011 -- by Hamilton turning on Andrew Bailey's 95-mph offering on a 2-and-0 count.

-- Of course, the A's are never technically out of it until they're, well, technically out of it. But what has Oakland shown you thus far that leads you to believe the A's can turn it around. Especially with the way they're limping to the first-half finish line? These last 13 games before the All-Star break were supposed to be a true litmus test, a chance for the A's to make a statement. With one game left, they are a less-than-uninspiring 4-8 against Florida, Arizona, Seattle and Texas. More damning, they are just 1-5 against division rivals in the Mariners and Rangers.

-- So how did the A's, who now find themselves 11 games behind the Rangers, get here in a game they led 4-0 after batting around in the second inning? By being the A's. That is, a team that is simply not good enough to overcome silly mistakes.

-- Jemile Weeks should have been charged with an error when he tried to backhand Mitch Moreland's second-inning, two-out grounder and the ball instead bounded off his leg for what was ruled a single. One batter later, Yorvit Torrealba's double off the center-field wall gave the Rangers their first run in their eventual comeback.

-- Chris Carter's seeming inability to pull the trigger at the plate looks like it's also manifested itself in the field. His slow reaction time on shots hit his way at first has many scratching their heads, almost as much as his purportedly hearing Weeks' footsteps on fouled pop-ups. At least three hits down the line might have been corralled by Carter having a smidgen of a quicker reaction time in this series.

-- Brandon McCarthy, a former Rangers pitcher, was cruising along through four innings. That should not have been a surprise, given he had held opposing batters to a .213 average in Arlington since 2008. What was a surprise was how quickly he gave it all back in the fifth inning.

-- A's fans have to be absolutely flummoxed. Wasn't this team supposed to contend for the division title with all of that young, talented pitching? In some corners, yes. In others, including this one, a more wait-and-see approach was taken. We'll see how the A's respond to this latest loss.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Shoemaker Shuts Hounds Down

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

There were characters dressed in "super hero" costumes at Dickey-Stephens Park Friday night, but Iron Man, Superman and Captain America (and if that was the "real" Captain America, we're in serious trouble) couldn't hold a candle to Matt Shoemaker and his beard.

The Arkansas starter tossed his fourth complete game in 12 starts, going the distance for a 2-hit shutout, as the Travelers defeated the RockHounds, 5-0.

Shoemaker, who stands 6-4, 225, sports a black beard that may not (quite) match that of Giants closer Brian Wilson, but comes close. The facial hair makes the right-hander look far older than his age (24), and Shoemaker pitches with a skill level beyond his years as well. He may also have had some added motivation, as the 'Hounds were one of only two trams to rough Shoemaker up, previously getting to him for eight hits and five runs in 6.0 innings, July 2 at Citibank Ballpark.

He gave up a first inning flair single to left-center off the bat of Adam Heether, but allowed only two walks from that point until Shane Peterson ripped a line drive single to right in the eighth inning. Shoemaker allowed only five base runners on the night (two hits, two walks and a hit batsman).

Angel Castillo doubled in the second and fourth innings, scoring twice and driving in a run, as the Travelers built a 4-0 lead.

Arkansas played its first game without center fielder Mike Trout. The 19-year-old was called up to the Major League LA Angels of Anaheim after Thursday night's game and made his big league debut Friday night at Anaheim, batting ninth in the Angels' game against the Seattle Mariners. Trout, rated the Angels' # 1 prospect, was hitting .324 with nine home runs, 27 RBI and 28 stolen bases (in 36 attempts) with the Travelers. He becomes the youngest active player in the Major Leagues.

The 'Hounds are 6-8 in the second half, three games behind first-place San Antonio (9-5) and one game behind Frisco (7-7).

ROAD 'HOUNDS - The RockHounds play at Dickey-Stephens Park in North Little Rock Saturday, followed by a 3-game set with the Cardinals at Hammons Field in Springfield, Missouri. It all "balances out," of course, but the 'Hounds are in a stretch of the season in which the club plays 18-of-24 games on the road.

ROCKY TOWN - The RockHounds return home for a weekend series with the Texas League's top club, the San Antonio Missions, beginning Thursday, July 14. The 'Hounds will host San Antonio on "Thirsty" Thursday through Sunday the 17th at Citibank Ballpark. Check out all the details at www.midlandrockhounds.org.

Nuts Home Runs Spell Loss for Ports

Stockton Ports

While it was another quiet night for the Ports on offense, the Nuts came through with enough hits to secure a 5-2 victory on Saturday evening. Nuts right fielder Kent Matthes had a big night, driving in four of the Nuts five runs of the evening, both on home runs.

Matthes started the night off quickly, getting his first homer of the evening in the first inning. With two outs already in the inning, Matthes drilled an 0-1 slider out to center field, for the first run of the ball game.

Matthes got the best of Ports starter Murphy Smith in the third inning. The inning began with Beau Seabury singled, followed by a Delta Cleary single and an Angelys Nina double to score Seabury. Matthes then stepped up and blasted his second home run to center field. That would be all the Nuts would get, and need, to win the game.

The Ports would attempt a comeback in the third, getting two runs of their own in the third. Leonardo Gil reached first on a throwing error. Then Myrio Richard drilled a two-run bomb over the left field for the only Ports runs of the game.

The Ports look for the series split tomorrow as Tyson Ross makes a rehab start with the Ports. First pitch is scheduled for 6:05 p.m.

Cougars Win 6-4

By Jon Versteeg, Burlington Bees

GENEVA, IL-The Kane County Cougars (11-5) scored single runs in the sixth and seventh innings to snap a 4-4 tie and earn a 6-4 win over the Burlington Bees (6-10) before 7,007 fans at Elfstrom Stadium on Saturday night.

The Cougars scored a run in the first inning on a wild pitch from Bees RHP Sean Murphy (0-3). DH Alex Llanos (3-5) singled and went to second base on a sacrifice bunt by RF Geulin Beltre (0-2). With LF Brian Fletcher (3-3) at the plate, Eibner scored on a wild pitch that skipped behind home plate for a 1-0 lead.

Kane County pushed across three runs in the fourth inning to take a 4-0 lead.

The Bees fought back with four runs in the fourth inning to tie the game. 3B Tony Thompson (3-4) singled and went to third base on a double by DH Josh Whitaker (2-4). 1B A.J. Kirby-Jones (0-3) walked to load the bases. RF Douglas Landaeta (0-3) hit a sacrifice fly to score Thompson for a 1-0 lead.

SS Yordy Cabrera (1-4) added an RBI double and LF Royce Consigli (1-4) hit a two-run single to score Kirby-Jones and Cabrera for a 4-4 tied score.

The Cougars scored the go-ahead run in the fifth inning on back-to-back doubles by Fletcher and 3B Cheslor Cuthbert (1-2) respectively to take a 5-4 lead. They added a run in the seventh inning against RHP Drew Tyson to take a 6-4 lead.

The Bees continue their series with the Kane County Cougars on Sunday at 1:00 p.m. RHP Nate Long (5-2, 2.81) gets the start for the Bees against RHP Jason Adam (2-4, 4.24) for the Cougars. Pre-game coverage begins at 12:40 p.m. on Newsradio 1490 KBUR and online at www.gobees.com.

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

Yankees Take Opener 2-1 On Saturday

By Paul Stanfield / Vermont Lake Monsters

BURLINGTON, VT --- The Staten Island Yankees took the opener of a three-game series 2-1 over the Vermont Lake Monsters in a matchup of New York-Penn League division leaders Saturday evening at historic Centennial Field.

Staten Island, which leads the McNamara Division with an 18-3 record, scored single runs off Vermont starter Brent Powers in the third and fourth innings for an early 2-0 lead. Casey Stevenson led off the third by striking out, but reached first safely on a Powers wild pitch. One out later Stevenson went to third on a Bobby Rinard single and then scored on a Mason Williams groundout.

Angelo Gumbs led off the fourth with a triple off the rightfield wall just out of the reach of rightfielder Xavier Macklin. Powers got a groundout for the first out of the inning, but then Reymond Nunez smashed a groundball up the middle off the glove of shortstop Sean Jamieson for a single to center allowing Gumbs to score.

Vermont, which leads the Stedler Division with a 13-7 record, got its only run of the game in the bottom of the fourth. Chris Addinito led off the inning with a double to leftcenter and scored one out later on an RBI single to center from Nick Rickles. That was the only scoring for the Lake Monsters, who had just three more hits over the final five innings.

Reliever Brett Gerritse (2-0) tossed two scoreless innings for the win for Staten Island, which has now won four straight and 17 of its last 18 gmes. Robert Paullus struckout three in two scoreless innings, while Branden Pinder a scoreless ninth for his sixth save. Gumbs, Nunez and Rinard each had two hits for the Yankees.

Powers (0-1) was charged with two runs on four hits with three strikeouts over five innings for the loss, while T.J. Walz struckout five in three scoreless innings of relief and Jeff Urlaub three strikeouts in a scoreless inning. Chad Lews had two hits for Vermont, which had a modest three-game winning streak snapped and lost for just the second time in seven home games this season.

Staten Island and Vermont meet again on Sunday afternoon beginning at 1:05 pm at Centennial. There will be a special appearance by former professional wrestler Brutus "The Barber" Beefcake at Sunday's game and "Have A Catch" on the field after the game for all fans in attendance.