

Bullpen meltdown costs A's chance to complete sweep of Rays

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's discovered the recipe Thursday for sucking life out of a winning streak.

Let the opposing pitcher off the hook after scoring five runs in the first inning, then mix in an epic bullpen meltdown in the later innings. The result: A 10-8 loss to the Tampa Bay Rays that was shocking in how drastically things went from good to bad for Oakland.

The A's -- who had won three straight -- still cling to faint hopes that they can contend in the American League West. But they trail first-place Texas by 121/2 games with 57 left to play, and they can ill-afford any break in momentum.

A four-game sweep of Tampa Bay would have been a good way to enter this weekend's three-game series against Minnesota. After that, the A's embark on a nine-game road trip to Seattle, Tampa Bay and Toronto. They are 18-35 away from O.co Coliseum.

"There's two months of baseball left," first baseman Conor Jackson said. "That's a lot of baseball. I've seen crazier stuff happen."

"Crazy" is a fitting description of what took place Thursday.

The A's scored five in the first off Rays right-hander Wade Davis, continuing the good vibes they built with Wednesday's 13-run output.

At one point they strung together six straight hits -- a sequence that included Hideki Matsui's single, Josh Willingham's RBI double, David DeJesus' two-run triple and Jackson's two-run homer.

That marked the first time in Oakland history that the A's hit for the cycle -- in order -- in four consecutive at-bats.

But after allowing the six straight hits, Davis (8-7) proceeded to retire 17 in a row until he left the game after the sixth.

"I felt like he invented a pitch, to tell you the truth," Jackson said. "He wasn't throwing a straight heater anymore. He was throwing an 87 (mph) sinker. We watched a lot of video, and he wasn't featuring that."

A's starter Rich Harden, who allowed three hits and struck out seven in six innings, gave up Desmond Jennings' two-run homer in the sixth that shaved the A's lead to 5-2.

Relievers Craig Breslow, Brad Ziegler and Brian Fuentes are all considered potential trade candidates for the A's, but their work in the seventh did not boost their value.

They combined to allow seven runs, turning a 5-2 A's lead into a 9-5 deficit.

Breslow allowed a walk and two hits, including Matt Joyce's RBI single that made it 5-3. Ziegler entered and allowed two straight walks, the second of which forced in a run.

He was pulled after Jennings' two-run single gave Tampa Bay a 6-5 lead.

Fuentes' first offering was a wild pitch that scored Sean Rodriguez to make it 7-5. Johnny Damon smacked Fuentes' next pitch for an RBI single to right but was out trying to advance. Then Evan Longoria launched a 3-1 pitch deep over the left-field wall to make it 9-5.

"Our offense, they're hitting the ball like crazy right now," Ziegler said. "We just have to do a better job of keeping the other team down."

The A's, hitting a major-league best .317 since the All-Star break, kept chipping away and brought the tying run to the plate in the ninth before Kyle Farnsworth closed it out for the Rays.

A's update: Effective Harden forced to throw a lot of pitches

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Rich Harden turned in an effective six innings against the Tampa Bay Rays on Thursday, but he had to work for it.

The A's starter didn't allow a hit until Ben Zobrist's single to lead off the fifth. He gave up two runs on three hits and two walks. But the Rays worked him for deep counts, and with Harden's pitch count at 105, manager Bob Melvin went to his bullpen to start the seventh.

That's when Tampa Bay did its damage, knocking around three relievers for seven runs in the inning as the A's lost 10-8.

"Rich pitched well," Melvin said. "One thing they did was make him throw some pitches -- 110 is the most he's thrown this year. He did his job for us, but sometimes a productive at-bat can be just a long at-bat, to where you get a pitcher out of a game an inning earlier."

Harden's runs came on Desmond Jennings' two-run homer in the sixth, which cut Oakland's lead to 5-2. The right-hander expressed no frustration to reporters about the bullpen blowing a win for him.

"It's going to happen to any team," Harden said. "(The bullpen) has been so good and so consistent out there. That home run in the sixth got (the Rays) going."

A cbssports.com report indicated the Atlanta Braves have interest in A's left fielder Josh Willingham. But the same report also claimed the Braves are engaged in talks with the San Diego Padres about acquiring outfielder Ryan Ludwick, making Willingham a secondary target.

Willingham went 2 for 4 with an RBI on Thursday. He's hitting .244 with a team-high 13 homers and 51 RBIs.

There's no indication of the A's making any trade, though a lot can happen before Sunday's 1 p.m. (PDT) trade deadline. Teams can continue to make trades until Aug. 31 and have players be eligible for the postseason.

But after Sunday's deadline, players must clear waivers first before being dealt.

Shortstop Cliff Pennington extended his hitting streak to 12 games, an A's season high.
Conor Jackson is hitting .365 (19 for 52) over his past 14 games.

Chin Music: Crisp gets a day off, plus a little Matsui discussion

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 7/28/2011 12:24pm

Slow news morning for the A's ... Coco Crisp is getting a day off, with Ryan Sweeney playing center field after his big night Wednesday.

—Hideki Matsui was a big topic in Bob Melvin's media session, no surprise considering how he's hitting. I asked Melvin about whether he thinks the outfield time that Matsui is getting might be benefitting him on the offensive side. Melvin said he definitely thinks that's the case, and that Matsui told him after interleague play ended that he'd like to continue playing some defense in addition to serving as DH.

"I think it helps with his focus," Melvin said. "He's so in tuned to the game, you're almost not using the full potential of him by just DH'ing him."

Today's lineups:

A's — Weeks 2B, Pennington SS, Matsui DH, Willingham LF, DeJesus RF, Jackson 1B, Sweeney CF, Suzuki C, Sizemore 3B; Harden RHP.

Rays — Jennings LF, Damon DH, Longoria 3B, Zobrist 2B, Kotchman 1B, Upton CF, Joyce RF, Chirinos C, Rodriguez SS; Davis RHP.

A's miss chance at first 4-game sweep of year

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

-- For six innings, Rich Harden appeared to be the story line for Oakland, trumping yet another good day for the A's at the plate.

After Harden left, though, it all turned sideways for Oakland. The bullpen crumpled, allowing seven runs in the seventh inning, and the A's, who'd been all lined up to record their first four-game sweep of the season, instead fell 10-8 to Tampa Bay.

"I'd like to think that was really surprising, because the bullpen has been a really solid unit this year," said right-hander Brad Ziegler, who gave up three runs and took the loss. "To unravel like that, give up a lead, is tough. The offense is hitting the ball like crazy, and we have to do a better job."

It was the second time this season the A's have blown a 5-0 lead. Usually, four-plus runs are a good omen for the A's. Oakland is 36-15 when scoring four runs or more.

Harden didn't allow a hit until the fifth or a run until the sixth, when Desmond Jennings hit his first big-league homer, a two-run shot to left. Harden pointed to that blow to try to shoulder some of the blame, despite his nice three-hit, seven-strikeout outing.

"The bullpen has been so good, so consistent out there," Harden said. "With the Rays, to lose the first three games of the series and get the home run in the sixth, it sparked their offense a little bit, got them going."

The A's relievers had put up a 2.47 ERA over the previous 34 games, and the bullpen's overall 3.08 ERA entering Thursday was the lowest in the league.

And then came the implosion.

Craig Breslow opened the seventh by walking Ben Zobrist, and allowing a base hit by Casey Kotchman and a one-out RBI single by Matt Joyce. Brad Ziegler took over, and he walked Sam Fuld and Sean Rodriguez, which scored a run, and gave up a two-run single by Jennings.

"I felt good, and 2-2, I threw Fuld a really good slider backdoor and Kurt Suzuki and I both thought it was a strike, and it wasn't," Ziegler said. "After that, I lost control of my fastball."

So left-hander Brian Fuentes replaced Ziegler, and his first pitch was wild, allowing Rodriguez to score. Johnny Damon singled to send in Jennings, but Damon was thrown out trying to go to second. Evan Longoria added to the damage, though, hitting a two-out solo homer off Fuentes.

Rookie Trystan Magnuson started the eighth and gave up a home run on the first pitch he threw, to B.J. Upton.

In three innings, the A's bullpen allowed seven hits and eight runs, walked four and struck out one.

"They walked some guys, they didn't make some pitches, they couldn't shut it down in the seventh inning," Oakland manager Bob Melvin said.

Harden has been scouted by several contenders as the trade deadline nears. The Yankees and Red Sox both had representatives on hand Thursday.

Oakland's cycle in 5-run 1st a statistical oddity

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

-- And for their latest trick, the A's re-energized offense offered up a first in Oakland history Thursday: The team hit for the cycle, in order and in consecutive at-bats.

The feat came in a five-run first inning. After one-out singles by **Cliff Pennington** and **Hideki Matsui**, **Josh Willingham** hit a two-run double and **David DeJesus** an RBI triple. **Conor Jackson** followed with a two-run homer.

The last major-league team to hit for the cycle in order in consecutive at-bats was Colorado on June 6, 2008, versus Milwaukee.

Ryan Sweeney singled after Jackson's homer, but Tampa Bay starter **Wade Davis** then retired 17 in a row before leaving.

"It felt like he invented a pitch, to be honest with you," Jackson said of Davis' turnaround. Davis said he used his curveball more and went after the A's hitters less aggressively, which threw them off balance.

Once Davis left, the A's added single runs in the seventh (a solo homer by **Kurt Suzuki**), eighth (an RBI grounder by DeJesus) and ninth (RBI single by **Scott Sizemore**).

"Usually when a five-run lead disappears, for a pitching-rich team like us it can be demoralizing," manager **Bob Melvin** said. "But we picked it up and battled to the end."

For the first time since September 2007, the A's have scored four or more runs in eight consecutive games.

Jackson has hit safely in eight games, batting .406, and Pennington's career-best hitting streak is at 12 games (.455).

Doing good: Many A's players have been involved in community efforts during this home stand, with a particularly standout performance from left-hander **Craig Breslow**, whose Strike 3 Foundation presented Children's Hospital of Oakland a \$25,000 grant this week to entirely fund a teen cancer support group and siblings program.

Breslow, **Andrew Bailey**, **Brian Fuentes**, Sizemore and **Brad Ziegler** will help at a baseball clinic for 250 underprivileged children in Oakland today, part of the Players Trust City Clinics program, and second baseman **Jemile Weeks** and team President **Michael Crowley** will unveil the refurbished outdoor wiffle ball/kickball area at the Oakland Schools Police Department, a joint project of the A's and the Good Tidings Foundation.

Leading off

Barton's shoulder: Dr. Lewis Yocum found no definitive tear in the labrum in Daric Barton's right shoulder, assistant general manager David Forst said. Yocum will consult further with doctors for the A's and Triple-A Sacramento.

Drumbeat: Coco Crisp gets a day off, and Ryan Sweeney is back in A's lineup

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum 7/28/2011 12:07pm

It's just a day off for Coco Crisp, day game after a night game, although it's clear that Ryan Sweeney was going to be in the lineup today no matter what after his three-hit, triple-shy-of-the-cycle night last night. Manager Bob Melvin said that he'd already had thoughts of playing Sweeney today - he's 3 for 6 lifetime against Tampa Bay starter Wade Davis - and his performance last night sealed it.

Here's the lineup behind Rich Harden: Weeks 2b, Pennington ss, Matsui DH, Willingham lf, DeJesus rf, Jackson 1b, Sweeney cf, Suzuki c, Sizemore 3b

Assistant general manager David Forst said that Dr. Lewis Yocum did not find definitive evidence of a tear in Daric Barton's right shoulder, so he is consulting with the team doctors in Oakland and at Triple-A Sacramento on the next step. It's unclear if Barton will have surgery at this point.

A's fall to Rays despite five-run first inning

By Jane Lee / MLB.com | 7/28/2011 8:40 PM ET

OAKLAND -- The unpredictable nature of Oakland's 2011 campaign again took on more life Thursday.

Unfortunately for the A's, it came in the form of a five-run lead gone bad, by way of a seventh-inning bullpen meltdown that resulted in a roaring comeback by the Rays in an eventual 10-8 defeat.

The relief trio of Craig Breslow, Brad Ziegler and Brian Fuentes combined to allow seven runs in the game-changing frame, wiping away what once appeared like more than enough cushion to ensure a four-game sweep of a sinking Rays team.

"I'd like to think it's really surprising because I feel like, as a whole, the bullpen's been a really solid unit this year," Ziegler said. "For it to unravel and to give away a lead like that is tough, no matter how many guys it was that took part in it. Our offense, they're hitting the ball like crazy right now and we just need to do a better job of keeping the other team down to make sure the runs that we score, that they matter."

Oakland's relief corps, in fact, entered the day with an American League-best 3.08 ERA, including a 2.47 mark over the previous 34 games. But starter Rich Harden's departure following six respectable frames was only followed by disaster, as Breslow quickly gave up a run and left two on base for Ziegler, who proceeded to issue walks to Sam Fuld and Sean Rodriguez before surrendering a two-run single to Desmond Jennings.

That provided the Rays with a lead they would never give back, despite Oakland's own comeback attempt featuring three runs in the final three innings, highlighted by Kurt Suzuki's eighth homer of the season in the eighth.

"I can't speak for the other guys, but I felt good on Fuld," Ziegler said. "I got him 2-2 and threw a really good slider back door and [Suzuki] and I both thought it was a strike and it wasn't. After that I just lost command of my fastball and it was either way out of the zone or right down the middle."

Aside from the uncharacteristically unstable showing from the bullpen, the change of events was perhaps fueled by a sense of urgency from the other side, where the Rays had watched the A's outscore them, 31-10, up to that point dating back to Monday.

Oakland sent nine men to the plate in the opening frame against right-hander Wade Davis, hitting for the cycle in order for the first time in Oakland history and the first time in the Majors since Colorado did so June 6, 2008, against Milwaukee.

Fittingly, Cliff Pennington jumpstarted the inning with a base hit to extend his career-high hitting streak to 12 games. Hideki Matsui, Josh Willingham, David DeJesus and Conor Jackson followed with a single, double, triple and home run.

"I think this is what they envisioned when they put this team together," Jackson said. "Granted, I don't think they wanted it to happen after the All-Star break. I'm sure they wanted to see glimpses of it before, but I think things are starting to click."

The A's are hitting .317 since the break, a number that made Davis' task of rebounding appear all the more daunting. But the righty settled in and retired 17 straight thereafter, going six total while squeaking by with the win.

"It felt like he invented a pitch, to tell you the truth," Jackson said. "He wasn't throwing a straight heater anymore. He wasn't throwing 92, 93 [mph]. He was throwing 87, a sinker. I think we watched a lot of video and he wasn't featuring that. It took some time to get adjusted to it, and once we did he was at 100 pitches, so it's kind of a catch-22."

Harden, meanwhile, tossed six solid innings, faced one over the minimum through five and allowed just two runs on the afternoon -- a two-run home run from Desmond Jennings -- while striking out seven and walking two.

"That's who he is," Rays manager Joe Maddon said. "This guy's been injured off and on. You saw 94 [mph] when he wanted it. You saw an outstanding split that he's had for many, many years, definitely a feel for pitching. He's really good. ... With good health he's going to pitch at a high level for a long time."

Harden is now 2-1 with a 4.30 ERA in five starts since being reinstated from the disabled list on July 3, and has suddenly given general manager Billy Beane more trade bait should the A's decide to be sellers before Sunday's Trade Deadline.

There are plenty of pieces Beane could move if he wanted to, with Willingham, DeJesus, Coco Crisp and several relievers garnering interest from contending teams. But the organization isn't willing to easily part with any without receiving an appropriate return, and the club's recent play -- 8-5 since the break -- could further influence Beane to stay the course with his current squad.

Despite standing 12 games behind first-place Texas in the American League West and 11 below the .500 mark after Thursday's loss, the A's wouldn't mind moving forward as is.

"We have confidence right now, and we're feeding off each other," Jackson said. "There's two months of baseball left. That's a lot of baseball. I've seen crazier stuff happen."

Sweeney earns another start for A's

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A's manager Bob Melvin's potential plans to play Ryan Sweeney on Thursday turned definite following the outfielder's three-hit showing the night before, including his first home run in nearly 15 months.

"Based on his game last night," Melvin said, "it made it easy to put him in there today."

So did Sweeney's career numbers vs. Tampa Bay hurler Wade Davis. He entered the day 3-for-6 against the right-hander and singled during a five-run first inning.

Going into Thursday, he was also 11-for-33 in the month of July after batting just .228 in June, and is now hitting .290 on the season spanning 71 games.

Melvin has proven to be a big supporter of rewarding strong performances with starts, though he's not as much of a fan of quickly sitting his players in the midst of struggles.

"For me, I try to stay away from the punishment day off, where a guy is 0-for-12 and or takes an 0-for-5 and gets a day off," Melvin said. "Those feel like punishment. I try to do it based on how many games they've played and more [about] rest they need than anything else for me. A guy can get an off-day after a 3-for-4 if that's what the schedule dictates for me."

With Sweeney in the mix for Thursday's series finale via a start in center field, Coco Crisp received the day off. Crisp has 11 hits in his past 35 at-bats, with four multi-hit games over the last nine contests.

Red-hot Matsui becoming fixture in A's lineup

OAKLAND -- Off-days were once a norm for Hideki Matsui in the beginning of the season. Now, not so much.

"His days off are the [designated hitter] days," manager Bob Melvin said. "We've been playing him in the outfield some, and I've been trying not to do that too much, just enough to keep him involved and fresh. I'm sure I'll give him a day off at some point in time here, but it's pretty tough to do right now."

The 37-year-old veteran made his 12th start in 13 games since the All-Star break on Thursday, a span during which he entered the day hitting .444 with a .756 slugging percentage, three home runs and a Major League-leading 17 RBIs.

Talk of those numbers has led to mention of his increased time in the outfield and the correlation between the two.

"I think it helps with his focus," Melvin said. "He's so in tune with the game, and you're almost not using the full potential of him by DH'ing him. You're almost juggling that brain of his to prepare him to do whatever, and I think having that type of player and using that type of resource is valuable."

"I think he really benefits from playing defense and playing a full game at least once a week, maybe twice a week. He's in the right place, takes good routes, all of the above."

Twins aim to cool off A's resurgent offense

By Anthony Chiang / MLB.com | 7/28/2011 11:34 PM ET

The All-Star break didn't just mark a resting period for the A's. It also served as a rejuvenation period for their offense.

As Oakland begins a three-game series with Minnesota on Friday, the A's will feature a surprisingly hot offense.

Entering Friday's game, Oakland is hitting a Major League-leading .317 since the break. It has also scored four runs or more in eight consecutive games for the first time since 2007.

That success has translated into an 8-5 record since the All-Star break.

"I feel like with the way we're going, any push is possible at this point because we're winning," Oakland second baseman Jemile Weeks said. "The way the offense is, if we continue to go this way it can only be a positive thing when you're winning. We're just hoping for the best through that."

Weeks has been a key contributor, collecting 10 RBIs since the break as Oakland's leadoff hitter.

"It feels great," Weeks said. "You feel like you're the catalyst and can help get things started. When you feel like that and you see everything following through -- everyone hitting and producing runs -- you just feel like you're helping the team out big time."

Oakland will send lefty Gio Gonzalez (9-7, 2.67 ERA) to the mound Friday to help support the offense. He is 2-2 with an 8.03 ERA in five career starts against the Twins, but tossed six shutout innings in his lone start against them this season.

On the other side, the Twins will start Francisco Liriano (6-8, 4.82 ERA). The left-hander lasted just 2 1/3 innings in his last start, allowing four runs on six hits against Detroit on Sunday.

"We were trying to get him to just throw his fastball over the plate, and he really couldn't find anything," Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said. "He was spinning off the ball. Hopefully, there will be better days ahead for him."

Twins: Minnesota recalls Tolbert

The Twins optioned left-handed pitcher Chuck James to Triple-A Rochester and recalled second baseman Matt Tolbert in his place on Thursday.

Tolbert's promotion is due in part to second baseman Alexi Casilla's injured right hamstring. Casilla was placed on the 15-day disabled list, and infielder Luke Hughes also was recalled.

Tolbert hit .181 in 55 games with the Twins earlier this season.

A's: Pennington extends hit streak

Cliff Pennington, who is batting .465 since the All-Star break, extended his career-high hit streak to 12 games Thursday with a first-inning single.

Worth noting

- Gonzalez has allowed three runs or less in eight of his past 10 starts.
- Liriano is 1-3 with a 4.91 ERA in 10 career appearances against the A's.

A's lose to Rays, 10-8

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — The A's offense staked Rich Harden to a five-run lead in the first inning, and the right-hander did enough to make it stand up.

All it took was one inning — one very bad inning — by three Athletics relievers to let it all go to waste.

Desmond Jennings hit his first career home run and later added a two-run double in a seven-run seventh inning and the Tampa Bay Rays rallied from five runs down to stun the A's 10-8 Thursday.

"It was just a big seventh-inning problem," Oakland manager Bob Melvin said.

That's putting it mildly.

Every Tampa Bay starter had at least a hit or a run in the seventh after Harden's afternoon was finished. Jennings, who hit a two-run homer off Harden in the sixth, had a two-run single in the inning before Evan Longoria capped the outburst with his 14th home run of the season.

In all, Tampa Bay had five hits and three walks in its highest-scoring inning of the season. All three batters who walked scored.

"They've been so good and so consistent out there," Harden said of the A's bullpen. (Jennings) hit that home run in the sixth and that sparked their offense a little bit.

The A's jumped on Tampa Bay starter Wade Davis early when they batted around in the first inning and had four straight batters go single, double, triple, homer.

Cliff Pennington's one-out single preceded the Oakland cycle. Hideki Matsui also singled, Josh Willingham hit an RBI double and David DeJesus followed with a two-run triple before Jackson's home run made it 5-0.

It's the first time in their Oakland history that the A's have hit for the cycle with four consecutive batters. It also was the eighth consecutive game in which they've scored at least four runs, the team's longest such streak since 2007.

Oakland's offense went silent after that, while Tampa Bay stormed back with two runs in the sixth, seven in the seventh and one more in the eighth.

"We knew Wade could pitch and all we had to score some runs," Jennings said. "We just had to put runs on the board."

It's the first time the Rays have overcome a five-run deficit to win since June 1, 2010, when they rallied to win at Toronto 7-6.

That spoiled an otherwise solid outing by Harden, who gave up three hits and two runs over six innings. The right-hander, who missed the first three months of the season with a strained right shoulder, retired the first nine batters and didn't allow a hit until Ben Zobrist's leadoff single in the fifth.

Harden retired the next two batters and finished with seven strikeouts and two walks. He left with a 5-2 lead but wound up with no-decision after the meltdown by the bullpen.

Craig Breslow was tagged for three runs in one-third of an inning, Brad Ziegler also allowed three — including a bases-loaded walk — while Brian Fuentes gave up Longoria's home run.

Ziegler (3-2) failed to retire a batter.

"As a whole the bullpen's been a really solid unit this year, so for it to unravel and to give away a lead like that is tough, no matter how many guys took part in it," Ziegler said. "Our offense is hitting the ball like crazy right now and we have to do a better job keeping the other team down to make sure that the runs we score matter."

B.J. Upton also homered for Tampa Bay to make a winner out of Davis (8-7), who struggled early before settling down to retire 17 straight batters for his first win since June 25. The Rays' right-hander gave up five runs and six hits in the first inning but didn't allow another runner after that.

Joel Peralta, Jake McGee and Kyle Farnsworth finished off the A's over the final three innings to help Tampa Bay win for the second time in its last seven games. Farnsworth earned his 20th save in 24 tries.

The A's, who had a nine-run fourth inning Wednesday, couldn't do anything after their big first inning and blew a five-run lead for the second time this season.

Kurt Suzuki homered in the seventh, DeJesus added on RBI on a fielder's choice grounder in the eighth and the A's added another run in the ninth before Farnsworth struck out Pennington with a runner at second to end it.

Notes: Pennington, who entered the game as the hottest hitter in the majors since the All-Star break, extended his career-high hitting streak to 12 games. ... The last team to hit for the cycle as a team with four consecutive batters was Colorado on June 6, 2008.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Taylor's throw home gives Sacramento the victory

By Mike Morris / Sacramento River Cats

Left fielder Michael Taylor recorded a game-winning double play as Sacramento beat host Tacoma 5-4 on Thursday night. With one out and the bases loaded in the bottom of the ninth, Taylor caught a fly ball in left field and threw out Johan Limonta at the plate to end the game.

River Cats left-hander Carlos Hernandez was consistent as usual. Including Thursday night's outing, the left-handed Hernandez pitched his eighth straight game in which he allowed three runs or less.

Sacramento jumped on the board first in the second inning, scoring on a single by Adrian Cardenas that scored Adam Rosales for a 1-0 lead. In the third inning, Taylor drove in Chris Carter on a sharp line drive to left field.

Jermaine Mitchell singled to lead off the fourth inning, eventually scoring after a wild pitch moved him over to second. With Jai Miller at the plate, Mitchell was able to keep the attention of Nate Robertson before the Tacoma starter eventually through the ball, giving Mitchell the time to make it home. With Kevin Kouzmanoff on base, Carter tripled to left, driving in Kouzmanoff for the final run of the fourth inning.

Tacoma made some noise in the fourth inning, cutting the lead in half after Limonta drove in Alex Liddi and Michael Saunders with a hit to left field.

The Rainiers made things interesting late, scoring one in the seventh and one in the bottom of the ninth.

With one out and two men on base in the ninth, the River Cats opted to walk pinch-hitter Matt Mangini, leaving it up to the top of the lineup to put the game into extra innings or take the lead. The ensuing batter, Kyle Seager flied to left fielder Taylor, who fired home to throw out Limonta.

The River Cats look to take the final game of the series Friday night. Tune-in to hear Johnny Duskow call the game at 7:05 p.m. on Talk 650 KSTE

RockHounds pull out win over Frisco

Staff Reports, Midland Reporter-Telegram

FRISCO -- The Midland RockHounds found some timely hitting and managed to take a 4-2 win against the Frisco RoughRiders at Dr Pepper Park on Thursday. The victory gives Midland the series, as it won the final two of the three-game series.

The RockHounds were outhit by Frisco 8-5 but showed some patience at the plate, drawing five walks off of RoughRiders starter Carlos Pimentel. Pimentel walked five batters over 5 1/3 innings of work.

The RockHounds got on the board first when first baseman Michael Spina hit a fly ball to center field that was deep enough to score designated hitter Matthew Sulentic, who had led off the game with a single to right and his 17th stolen base of the season.

Frisco tied it up in the bottom of the second, courtesy of a solo home run by designated hitter Michael Bianucci. A second solo home run, this time by right fielder Jonathan Greene in the fifth inning, briefly gave Frisco a 2-1 advantage.

But Midland answered right back, scoring two runs in the top of the sixth and retaking the lead. Pimentel lost the location of his pitches and walked Wes Timmons, Stephen Parker and Spina to lead off the inning.

Pimentel was replaced by reliever Corey Young, but Young didn't fair much better. He walked Adam Heether, the first batter he faced, and brought in the game-tying run. Young did manage to force Midland center fielder Shane Peterson to ground into a double play, but Parker still scored on the sequence for a 3-2 RockHounds lead.

The RockHounds got an insurance run in the eighth when Timmons led off the frame with an infield single, stole second and advanced to third when Frisco second baseman didn't catch a pickoff attempt. Timmons scored on a double to left by Heether.

RockHounds starter Shawn Haviland (4-9) delivered one of his best starts of the year, allowing two runs, both earned, on eight hits and a walk while striking out three batters over six innings.

Trey Barham pitched a perfect 1 1/3 innings, while Jon Meloan took care of the final 1 2/3 innings to pick up his third save as a RockHound.

Midland returns home to Citibank Ballpark at 7 p.m. today for the beginning of a seven-game homestand. First up in Game 1 of a four-game series against the Corpus Christi Hooks.

Three-Run Burst Lifts Ports Past Rawhide

Stockton Ports

VISALIA, Calif. - It didn't take many offensive surges on Thursday night for the Stockton Ports to earn their third straight win. After being no-hit through the first 5.2 innings by Visalia Rawhide starter Derek Eitel (5-7), the Ports scored three runs on three hits in span of four batters-enough to propel them to a 3-1 victory over Visalia and send the Rawhide to their sixth straight loss.

For the Ports, a big component to their win was the start turned in from James Simmons. Simmons, after allowing six runs in a third of an inning his last time out against the Rawhide, was solid on Thursday night. Simmons went four scoreless innings while allowing just two hits and striking out three.

Eitel, meanwhile, didn't allow a hit over his first 5.2 innings. After retiring the first two batters of the 6th, Eitel yielded a double to right to Conner Crumbliss. Myrio Richard followed with a walk. With two on and two out, Michael Gilmartin stepped to the plate and doubled off the left field wall, driving in both baserunners and giving the Ports a 2-0 lead. Ryan Lipkin followed with an RBI single to left to make it a 3-0 advantage.

Eitel would make it through the 6th but take the loss, allowing three runs on three hits while striking out five.

A.J. Huttenlocker (3-0) took over for Simmons in the 5th and retired the first seven batters he faced. With one out in the 7th, Huttenlocker allowed a solo home run to Matt Davidson, ending Huttenlocker's scoreless innings streak at 20.2 innings. It was the only run Huttenlocker allowed as he earned the win, going 2.2 innings and allowing two hits while striking out four.

Josh Lansford took over with one on and two out in the 7th and got Rossmel Perez to ground out to end the frame. Lansford would go on to pitch 1.1 scoreless innings.

In the 9th, Jose Guzman (SV, 17) had to battle through a bases-loaded jam to earn the save. With two on and two out, Guzman walked Perez to put the possible tying runs in scoring position and possible winning run at first. Guzman, however, would get Brent Greer to ground to second to end the ballgame and record his 17th save of the season.

The Ports and Rawhide will play the third game of their four-game set on Friday night at Recreation Park. Rob Gilliam (10-4, 5.16 ERA) will take the hill for Stockton, opposed by Visalia left-hander David Holmberg (1-2, 4.94 ERA). First pitch is set for 7 p.m. PDT.

Bees Fall 4-1 At Home

By Jon Versteeg, Burlington Bees

BURLINGTON, IA-The Beloit Snappers (16-16) scored four runs on seven hits to earn a 4-1 win over the Burlington Bees (9-23) before 732 fans at Community Field on Thursday night. The loss extends the Bees current losing streak to nine games.

The Snappers opened the scoring in the fifth inning against Burlington RHP Nate Long (6-5). LF Derek McCallum (2-4) singled and went to second base on a sacrifice bunt by C Jhonatan Arias (0-2). SS Adam Bryant (2-2) singled McCallum to third base. He scored on a sacrifice fly by CF Daniel Santana (0-3) for a 1-0 lead. 2B Reggie Williams (1-4) added an RBI double to plate Bryant and make it 2-0.

The Snappers scored single runs in the seventh and eighth innings to earn a 4-0 lead.

The Burlington Bees scored a single run in the eighth inning. C John Nester (1-3) hit a one-out double and scored on a single by LF Royce Consigli (2-4) to make it 4-1.

Long pitched seven innings and allowed three runs on six hits to suffer the loss. He walked one and struck out four men in his longest outing of 2011. He had previously gone six innings in three separate starts in 2011.

The Burlington Bees and Beloit Snappers finish their series on Friday night at 6:30 p.m. It's "Big Fun Friday" with 16 ounce cans of Bud and Busch Light on sale for just \$3.25. It's also a special fireworks show after the game brought to you by the Greater Burlington Partnership. The Bees will also host Hawaiian Luau Night where Community Field will be turned into a Hawaiian paradise! The Snappers will send RHP A.J. Achter (3-3, 4.47) to the mound against RHP Josh Bowman (6-3, 3.75) for Burlington. Pre-game coverage begins at 6:10 p.m. on Newsradio 1490 KBUR and online at www.gobees.com

Vermont 2-1 Rain-Shortened Loss

By Paul Stanfield / Vermont Lake Monsters

WILLIAMSPORT, PA --- The Williamsport Crosscutters scored two runs in the bottom of the fourth inning for a 2-1 victory over the Vermont Lake Monsters in a New York-Penn League game shortened to five innings by rain Thursday night at Bowman Field.

Vermont scored a single run in the top of the fourth as Chad Lewis smacked a one-out double and then after back-to-back walks scored on a Nick Rickles sacrifice fly to left. Lewis' double was the only hit over five innings for the Lake Monsters, who also struckout eight times including seven of the first eight outs of the game.

Aaron Altherr reached on catcher's interference to lead off the bottom of the fourth before scoring on back-to-back singles from Kelly Dugan and Maikel Franco. Dugan then scored the go ahead run from second base on back-to-back groundouts for a 2-1 Williamsport lead.

Lake Monsters had a chance to tie the game in the fifth as Jacob Tanis led off with a walk, stole second and moved to third on an Aaron Shipman groundout. But Tanis was stranded at third as Sean Jamieson grounded out to first and Michael Fabiaschi struckout. The tarp was then put on the field prior to the bottom of the fifth inning before the game was officially called a little over an hour later.

Seth Frankoff (2-2) allowed two runs (one earned) on three hits over four innings for the loss, while Austin Wright (3-1) gave up one run on one hit with three walks and eight strikeouts over five innings for the win.

The Lake Monsters and Crosscutters wrap the series at Williamsport on Friday at 7:05 pm before Vermont returns to historic Centennial Field on Saturday to begin a seven-game homestand against Brooklyn and State College.