

Mariners complete sweep of suddenly stumbling A's

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's spent the past three days providing a morale boost for the down-and-out Seattle Mariners.

A 7-4 loss at Safeco Field on Wednesday completed a three-game sweep at the hands of the Mariners, who had dropped 19 of their previous 21 and were less than a week removed from a club-record 17-game losing streak.

The A's were outplayed in all phases during the series and fell to 4-9 on the season against the last-place Mariners. Oakland is only a half-game in front of Seattle in the A.L. West.

"I know that as a team we better be upset about how we played here," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "Coming off a good stretch where we played very well, to come and get beat three games ... I'm hoping and guessing that everybody's pretty upset about the way we played."

The A's were coming off a 5-2 homestand, but the momentum they built was lost between Oakland and Seattle. They begin the second leg of this three-city road trip Friday at Tampa Bay and then play three at Toronto.

The Mariners, at 48-62, should have been the easiest assignment of the trip. But at 18-38 away from the O.co Coliseum, the A's appear to have no easy road assignment. The Baltimore Orioles (17-36) are the only major league team to have a worse road record than the A's, and that's by percentage points.

Melvin stressed he's not upset over a lack of effort between the lines but more by the lapses between the ears.

"We just sometimes in the middle innings need to focus a little bit better, all the way around," he said.

The A's aren't good enough to overcome the breakdowns that inevitably surface.

Third baseman Scott Sizemore's fielding error during the Mariners' two-run seventh gave the A's 17 errors in 19 games since the All-Star break. Overall, their 89 errors are the third-most in the majors.

They failed to score in a bases-loaded situation with fewer than two outs in every game of the series. On Wednesday, the A's trailed 4-1 in the top of the seventh when Adam Rosales batted with the bases full and one out against Jamey Wright. He grounded into a 6-4-3 double play.

Although the A's accumulated 25 hits in three games against Seattle, they scored just 10 runs. And consider the Mariners traded two starters last weekend in Erik Bedard and Doug Fister.

Rookie Charlie Furbush (2-3), starting Wednesday in Fister's place, allowed just two hits in five innings.

"It's very frustrating," A's left fielder Josh Willingham said. "I don't have any explanation. Obviously we wanted to come in here and win the series, and it didn't happen."

Left-hander Gio Gonzalez (9-9) continued his recent struggles, allowing a season-high 10 hits over 6 1/3 innings and getting charged with six runs.

Josh Bard buzzed a two-run single past his head to open the scoring in the fourth.

After Sizemore's RBI double brought the A's to within a run in the fifth, Gonzalez couldn't deliver a shutdown inning in the bottom half.

Brendan Ryan chopped a sacrifice bunt attempt that he beat out for a single to put two runners on. Mike Carp's RBI groundout made it 3-1, and Casper Wells singled home another run on a bouncer that took a big hop over Sizemore's glove at third.

Gonzalez is 1-4 with a 6.26 ERA over his past five starts.

"You've got to throw strikes," Gonzalez said. "I'm putting people on base that shouldn't be there. That's an easy way to give up runs."

Seattle scored two runs in the seventh on hits off Trystan Magnuson, both charged to Gonzalez, and the Mariners added one more in the eighth to make it 7-1.

Willingham's three-run homer in the ninth made the score respectable.

Sizemore has good and bad moments vs. Seattle

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

SEATTLE -- A's third baseman Scott Sizemore had mixed results Wednesday in a 7-4 loss to the Seattle Mariners.

He drove home Oakland's first run in the fifth with a double off Charlie Furbush. Later that inning, with the A's trailing 2-1, he was thrown out at third for an inning-ending double play as he tagged up and tried to advance on Adam Rosales' fly-out to center.

Sizemore beat Franklin Gutierrez's throw to third, but momentum from his head first slide took him off the bag and he was tagged out.

"I feel like I played it right, I just slid off the bag," Sizemore said. "I was safe if I stay on the bag, I just gotta make sure I do stay on, if I am going to take that chance."

Sizemore also committed a fielding error in the seventh inning.

When it came to facing Furbush, the Mariners rookie who picked up Wednesday's victory, Sizemore had a more extensive scouting report than his A's teammates.

He and Furbush were teammates with the Detroit Tigers earlier this season before Sizemore was traded to the A's on May 27.

Detroit dealt Furbush to Seattle last weekend as part of a trade that sent starting pitcher Doug Fister and reliever David Pauley to the Tigers.

Sizemore and Furbush had dinner together during the A's series at Detroit on July 19-20.

That familiarity didn't provide much help when Sizemore dug in against him. "I didn't have any idea what (the ball) looked like coming out of his hand, even though we came up all through the minor leagues together," Sizemore said.

Sizemore flied out to center in his first at-bat against Furbush before doubling.

Designated hitter Hideki Matsui went 1 for 3 to extend his hitting streak to 12 games. Matsui entered the day batting .485 since the All-Star break, which led the majors based on hitters with a minimum of 50 plate appearances during that time.

He also led the American League in on-base percentage (.520) and slugging percentage (.727) since the break.

Outfielder David DeJesus (sore right thumb) took batting practice, but manager Bob Melvin said DeJesus was still reluctant to cut loose with his swings. Melvin is hopeful both DeJesus and shortstop Cliff Pennington, diagnosed with Bell's palsy on Monday, return to the lineup Friday against Tampa Bay.

Chin Music: Winless in Seattle — so far

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 8/3/2011 12:31pm

The roof is open at Safeco Field and it's another picturesque afternoon. Indeed, the weather has been terrific up here the past three days. The baseball? That's been a bit uglier, at least from the A's perspective. Getting swept by last-place Seattle is no way to begin a nine-game road trip, so the A's badly need a victory today with left-hander Gio Gonzalez on the mound.

Here's the lineups:

A's – Weeks 2B, Crisp CF, Matsui DH, Willingham LF, Jackson 1B, Sizemore 3B, Rosales SS, Sweeney RF, Powell C; Gonzalez LHP.

Mariners – Ichiro DH, Ryan SS, Ackley 2B, Carp 1B, Wells RF, Gutierrez CF, Bard C, Wilson 3B, Halman LF; Furbush LHP.

–David DeJesus remains out, as manager Bob Melvin said the outfielder's right thumb is more a mental issue right now than a physical one. DeJesus has been reluctant to cut it loose while swinging the bat. It appears his return will come Friday at Tampa Bay, when the A's might also welcome back shortstop Cliff Pennington. Pennington continues to do better following his Bell's palsy diagnosis. He got through full baseball activity Tuesday and said he could play right now if needed. He's being brought along slowly as a precaution.

–Tuesday night's game landed on the highlight reels for a couple different reasons. The A's ridiculously handled Brendan Ryan's infield single – letting him advance two extra bases while infielders wandered around confused. And then there was the Ichiro look-a-like who tried picking up the fair ball that Dustin Ackley hit down the right-field line. This guy heard a round of boos and then had to answer to stadium security for interfering with the game. I saw the same guy standing in front of the stadium this morning, wearing his No. 51 uniform and posing for pictures with fans. It's a regular gig for him.

One can only wonder how Ackley might wind up with a triple today. On Monday, Ryan Sweeney misplayed his low liner with the bases loaded, and Ackley wound up on third with three RBIs. Then a nutty fan interferes on a play Tuesday, and the umpires award Ackley another triple. We'll see what today has in store ...

A's get swept in Seattle, fall 7-3 in finale

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

The primary villain in Oakland's season is a team that doesn't play very well against anyone but the A's.

The Mariners are in last place and they had a dreadful July, but they always seem to perk up for Oakland. Seattle took Wednesday's series finale 7-4, completing a three-game sweep, and overall, the A's have dropped nine of 13 to the Mariners this season.

"I don't have an explanation," said Oakland manager Bob Melvin, a onetime Seattle manager. "As a team, we'd better be upset about the way we played here. Coming off a stretch where we played very well, to come in here and lose three games, I hope everyone is upset about the way we played collectively."

The A's went 5-2 on their recent homestand, and at the least, they appeared to have a good grip on third place while the Mariners were plummeting after a 6-20 July. Now Seattle is gaining on Oakland - the teams have the same loss total, and the A's have just one more win.

Since the start of the 2007 season, Oakland is 37-52 against Seattle, the worst winning percentage against the Mariners in the league over that stretch. Seattle fans might suggest it's payback for the 2006 season, when the A's used the Mariners to vault into a playoff spot by taking 17 of 19 games from Seattle.

The A's are 0-9-3 over their past 12 road series, and they have dropped 29 of their past 36 games away from the Coliseum.

Melvin said he didn't feel that his team lacked effort during the series at Safeco, but he thought that at times, the A's focus wasn't there, particularly in the middle of games.

The dip in concentration was "all the way around," Melvin said, but he particularly mentioned the defense, saying, "At times we just lose focus defensively. That's something we're going to continue to work on."

Scott Sizemore's error on a grounder by Franklin Gutierrez in the seventh gave Oakland 17 errors in 19 games since the break and 89 for the season, second most in the league.

Melvin noted that yet another bases-loaded situation didn't pan out; Adam Rosales hit into a double play with the bases loaded in the seventh, ending the inning.

"Those seem to be momentum swings," Melvin said. "At home we seem to be coming through there. Here, we didn't. If we do, we're looking at different ballgames."

On Wednesday, the Mariners did not have A's-killer Felix Hernandez on the mound, but Charlie Furbush proved to be nearly as tough. Furbush, acquired from Detroit last week, didn't allow a baserunner until, with one out in the fifth, Conor Jackson doubled off the top of the wall in left. The umpires briefly reviewed the drive to see if it was a homer, but they determined that it was not.

Sizemore sent Jackson home with a double to left. Sizemore was then thrown out at third trying to advance on a flyball by Adam Rosales, ending the inning.

"I played it right, I just slid off the bag," Sizemore said.

Sizemore, a longtime friend of Furbush's all the way through the Tigers organization, said he thought he had an idea of how Furbush would be working, and he said Furbush did a good job of keeping the A's off balance by mixing up his fastball, changeup and curveball.

In the ninth, Josh Willingham belted a three-run homer. He has three homers and 10 RBIs in his past six games.

Gio Gonzalez just a hair off against Mariners

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland starter **Gio Gonzalez** knew what went wrong Wednesday against the Mariners.

"I've got to throw strikes," he said after allowing 10 hits, four walks and six runs in 6 1/3 innings. "Putting people on base who shouldn't be on base is an easy way to give up runs."

Two of the walks Gonzalez issued turned into runs, and the number of hits matched Gonzalez's career high.

He said he didn't feel as if he was missing his spots by much, "maybe a hairline off," he said. "I've got to continue to pitch through that, make the minor adjustment."

Gonzalez had his personal five-game winning streak against Seattle snapped, and he is 1-4 with a 6.26 ERA over his past five outings overall.

Manager **Bob Melvin** said that Gonzalez had a good changeup working early, but, he said, "He was getting behind, throwing a lot of pitches."

Recently acquired left-hander **Jordan Norberto** allowed a run in the eighth.

Briefly: Oakland's best moment in the field came from catcher **Landon Powell**, who charged behind the plate for a foul popup by **Jack Wilson** and caught it with a last-second slide. ... **David DeJesus** remained out because, Melvin said, he wasn't letting it go completely during batting practice, more a mental issue as he comes back from right thumb soreness. ... DeJesus and **Cliff Pennington** (Bell's palsy) are likely to play Friday. ... Reliever **Jerry Blevins** cleared waivers and was optioned to Triple-A Sacramento. ... **Hideki Matsui** extended his hitting streak to 12 games. ... **Jemile Weeks** is hitting .180 over the past 11 games.

Leading off

Hey, isn't that ...? Asked about the Ichiro impersonator who reached over the rail and picked up a ball in play Tuesday, manager Bob Melvin joked, "I thought Ichiro was sitting in the stands and was going to get kicked out! It was confusing to me."

Drumbeat: No DeJesus or Pennington again; plus hodgepodge of A's items

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Safeco Field, 8/3/2011, 11:27am

David DeJesus remains out of the A's lineup, but manager Bob Melvin said it's not a physical thing, it's more mental. The right thumb is good to go, but DeJesus isn't really letting it fly in batting practice yet. That indicates DeJesus is probably available if needed on the bench, but in order to get back into the starting nine, he can't be favoring that thumb any.

Cliff Pennington is still out with Bell's Palsy, but he told me he is improved from yesterday, and he remains able to close his left eye. The concern today was maybe that the sun could be an issue with the eye, so he'll be off until Friday at the earliest. Pennington thinks he'll be ready to play then, and the A's will be in a dome for the three games at Tampa Bay, anyway. No sun or any wind to dry out that eye, which got dry and blurry when he couldn't close it on Monday.

Here's the lineup behind Gio Gonzalez, with Adam Rosales at shortstop rather than Eric Sogard: Weeks 2b, Crisp cf, Matsui DH, Willingham lf, Jackson 1b, Sizemore 3b, Rosales ss, Sweeney rf, Powell c.

Sogard was part of [the dreadful play in the first inning](#) last night in which Brendan Ryan wound up at third on a single off Sogard's glove, but as ex-A's infielder Adam Kennedy told me this morning, as bad as that play looks, "It's not really any one person's fault." Sogard and Scott Sizemore just both decided to do the same thing at the same time rather than one covering second and one third - and Sizemore, in particular, is unfamiliar with playing on the left side of the infield. So when Ryan just kept going to second, both Sogard and Sizemore broke toward second to cover, too late. Leaving no one at third.

Bob Melvin said that Sizemore's assignment there is to cover second, Sogard's third. The play probably looks a lot worse than it is; nevertheless, it's extremely rare to see a runner take two extra bases because they're uncovered. One, yes. Two is pretty awful.

Also last night, there was [an Ichiro lookalike](#) - a professional impersonator, I'm told - who reached over the railing down the first-base line and scooped up what was ruled a triple for Dustin Ackley. The fan, wearing an Ichiro jersey and really looking very similar, was escorted to a different part of the park and admonished about picking up balls in play, but his action did help the home team - the ruling on the field was that because Ackley was at second base, he would have made it to third.

Melvin disputed that - he noted to the umpiring crew that Ackley was in fact being held up at second, and there was no momentum toward third - but to no avail.

I asked Melvin if he'd noticed the fan's resemblance to Ichiro, and he joked, "I thought Ichiro was sitting in the stands and was going to get kicked out! It was confusing to me."

Apparently, this fan is known to sign autographs outside the stadium sometimes, and he was spotted near the A's hotel doing the same. A professional Ichiro impersonator - what a strange thing.

One thing I've been trying to wedge in somewhere but haven't had time goes all the way back to Saturday, the evening before the trade deadline, when then-A's player rep Brad Ziegler was telling me he wanted to propose that the deadline not come during or right before games because of the potential distraction for players and teams. He noted that most of the East Coast games would be underway when the deadline came at 4 p.m. Eastern on Sunday, and some rumored trade targets might have trouble concentrating. Worse, some teams might have players yanked out in the midst of the game.

As it turned out, Ziegler was the one traded just before Oakland's game on Sunday. He feels even more strongly now that the deadline should not be during the day when the bulk of teams are playing day games.

I'm planning on writing about Kurt Suzuki's disappointing season for Friday's paper, so I asked Melvin his impressions since he took over the team in early June, and he said that it's clear that the sub-par results - and the team not winning as much - weigh on Suzuki. He likes the fact that Suzuki takes it hard and doesn't just accept it, and he noted that Suzuki prepares as well as ever, he's always working extremely hard.

Melvin has pointed to Hideki Matsui's turnaround as an inspiration for Suzuki, though it's not easy to lift an average 55 points in less than three weeks in the big leagues, as Matsui has done. Melvin last night was raving about Matsui's streak, which has lifted his average to a season-high .264.

"It's very hard to do when you have that many at-bats," Melvin said. "The streak he's on is remarkable. You just don't move your average like that."

Athletics stymied by Furbush in finale

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

SEATTLE -- To question manager Bob Melvin about the A's subpar play against the Mariners this season is slightly unfair, as the interim skipper's only been around for half of the club's contests against them.

"I don't know," Melvin said. "I don't have an explanation."

But Melvin had plenty to say about Oakland's performance spanning the past three days, which resulted in three losses -- including Wednesday's 7-4 defeat -- and an accompanying sweep.

"I know that, as a team, we better be upset about how we played here," Melvin said. "Coming off a good stretch where we played very well, to come in here to get beat in three games -- by anybody, really -- I'm hoping and I'm guessing everybody is pretty upset about the way we played in those three games."

Asked if he expressed such concerns to his team, Melvin replied, "I might have mentioned it real briefly."

"We're frustrated," admitted Scott Sizemore. "You never want to come in here and lose three in a row, especially when we feel like we are playing pretty good baseball."

The A's are playing well -- or were, at least. In fact, the A's marched into Seattle as winners of five of seven on their recent homestand, having totaled 54 runs over that span.

But the bad, it seems, has outweighed the good more times than not for the A's this season, a campaign characterized by an underachieving 49-62 record, including a Major League-worst 18-38 road standing. And perhaps in no other place has that disparity been exhibited more than in the confines of Safeco Field, where they're 2-5 this year.

Overall, the A's have lost nine of 13 to a last-place Mariners club.

"[It's] very frustrating," Josh Willingham said. "Obviously, we wanted to come in and win the series, and it didn't happen."

Monday's loss was the result of pitching woes, thanks to another shaky start from Trevor Cahill, while Tuesday's was brought on by poor defense, including a wild first-inning play that saw Brendan Ryan wind up on third base on an infield single. Wednesday, then, was the offense's turn to deliver a sub-par performance. The pitching, too, came up short again.

The A's didn't get a hit off new Seattle lefty Charlie Furbush, acquired on Saturday via trade with Detroit, until the fifth inning, with Conor Jackson and Sizemore's back-to-back doubles with one out providing the only run support afforded southpaw Gio Gonzalez while he was in the game.

Sizemore, who essentially grew up with Furbush in the Tigers' system, said he had a pretty good idea of the left-hander's workings, but was still unsure of the way he would look out of the stretch.

"It looked like he was just mixing his pitches really well," Sizemore said. "He didn't double up on any of them. If you saw a fastball, he was coming with a changeup or curveball with the next one, and vice versa. He was keeping everybody off balance and keeping the ball down."

Furbush was primarily used out of the bullpen in Detroit and struggled in his only two starts, losing both while compiling an 8.59 ERA in those outings. But on Wednesday, he allowed just two hits and didn't walk a batter through five innings.

"I thought he threw the ball great," Seattle manager Eric Wedge said. "[He] used all of his pitches, trusted his fastball, trusted his stuff in general. Had good tempo and a lot of good things out there. "

The same couldn't be said of Gonzalez, who gave the A's 6 1/3 innings of work, but allowed six runs on a career high-tying 10 hits, with four walks and nine strikeouts. The 25-year-old All-Star has struggled since the break, specifically in his past three starts, in which he's thrown a combined 16 1/3 innings, with 16 earned runs, 26 hits and 10 walks attached to his name.

Gonzalez escaped potential trouble in both the first and third frames, but couldn't do the same in the fourth, when a two-run single off the bat of Josh Bard put Seattle on top, 2-0.

"You've got to throw strikes," Gonzalez said. "Putting people on base that shouldn't be on base, that's an easy way to give up runs. I have to continue to pound the strike zone, let them swing the bats and put it in play."

The Mariners added two runs in the fifth and again in the seventh, when Gonzalez put runners on first and second and subsequently exited after 118 pitches in favor of bullpen righty Trystan Magnuson, who surrendered an RBI single to Casper Wells before Sizemore's fielding error on Franklin Gutierrez's ground ball paved the way for another run.

The A's have committed 17 errors in 19 games since the All-Star break and 89 on the season, which ranks second in the American League to Texas' 91 and is just 10 fewer than Oakland's total for the 2010 season.

Adding to the frustration in Seattle were the situational hitting woes. The A's went a combined 6-for-25 with runners in scoring position during the trio of losses, with a lone bright spot coming in the ninth inning on Wednesday, when Willingham powered a three-run homer off righty Jeff Gray.

The effort is there on all ends, Melvin says. The focus, maybe not so much.

"Very few games we've gone just easily, but we just sometimes in the middle innings need to focus a little bit better ... all the way around," Melvin said. "Defense has obviously been a problem for us all year. It's not for a lack of effort. At times, we just lose our focus a bit defensively, and that's something we'll continue to work on and get better at."

Moscoso aims to end Niemann's success vs. A's

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com

The A's have an off-day on Thursday, and it could not come at a better time.

Reinforcements are on the way.

Oakland expects both Cliff Pennington and David DeJesus back in the lineup for Friday's series opener against the Rays in St. Petersburg. Pennington has been dealing with a bout of Bell's palsy, while DeJesus has been out with a sore right thumb.

DeJesus underwent surgery on the thumb last season while with the Royals, but appears physically ready to get back into game action.

"[On Tuesday], in batting practice, [DeJesus] didn't want to let it go," Oakland manager Bob Melvin said. "I don't think it was a physical thing that was hurting him, just a hurdle he has to get past, mentally."

As a team, the A's are struggling to find consistency, and Friday starter Guillermo Moscoso could be the poster child for their up-and-down season. Moscoso posted a 1.75 ERA in six starts before the All-Star break, but has compiled a 7.31 ERA since.

However, Moscoso has shown signs of rebounding, giving up just two runs over 6 1/3 innings against the Twins in his most recent start. In his only start against Seattle, he pitched seven shutout innings of two-hit ball while striking out five.

Jeff Niemann, who pitched his fifth consecutive quality start against Seattle in his most recent outing, will take the hill for Tampa Bay. The right-hander held the Mariners to no runs on three hits in 6 2/3 innings and also set a career high with 11 strikeouts in the outing.

Athletics: Former Rays pitcher returns

- Friday will mark Grant Balfour's return to Tropicana Field for the first time since he played with the Rays.

The reliever extended his scoreless streak to 14 2/3 innings on Sunday, matching his career high from June 8-July 9, 2008. He's allowed just one run over his past 20 games and has held opponents to a .187 average this season.

Balfour was traded by the Brewers to the Rays in 2007 and pitched for them until last season.

- Hideki Matsui is riding a 12-game hitting streak and is batting .521 with 11 runs scored, six doubles, two home runs and 10 RBIs over that span.

Rays: Longoria leading AL in RBIs

- Evan Longoria has 40 RBIs in 44 games since June 11, tops in the American League over that span. He also leads the Major Leagues with 19 walks in his first 17 games since the All-Star break.

- The Rays have signed Arizona State third baseman Riccio Torrez, their fourth-round selection in the 2011 First-Year Player Draft. The Rays have now signed 16 of their top 21 picks.

Worth noting

- Ryan Sweeney's hit streak ended at seven games when the Oakland outfielder went 0-for-4 against the Mariners on Wednesday. Sweeney hit .393 with seven runs scored, four doubles, one home run and five RBIs during the streak.
- Oakland catcher Kurt Suzuki, who has just nine hits in his past 45 at-bats, is hitting .198 over his past 47 games.

DeJesus, Pennington could return on Friday

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

SEATTLE -- Helped by an off-day on Thursday, the A's are eyeing returns for both David DeJesus and Cliff Pennington when the club opens a three-game set at Tampa Bay on Friday.

DeJesus, nursing a sore right thumb, was considered a potential option for Wednesday's series finale in Seattle, but was ultimately held out of the lineup. As a result, Ryan Sweeney made his third straight start in right field.

"[DeJesus's thumb] was that much better yesterday," manager Bob Melvin said. "I think it's just more of a mental thing to get over now. He could be available today, we'll see, but I'm more encouraged for after the off-day. [On Tuesday], in batting practice, he didn't want to let it go. I don't think it was a physical thing that was hurting him, just a hurdle he has to get past, mentally."

The careful approach the club is taking with DeJesus, who underwent surgery on the thumb last season while with the Royals, is the same path it's walking with Pennington, who on Monday was diagnosed with Bell's palsy, a disorder of the nerve that controls movement of the face muscles.

Pennington has since improved greatly and is taking part in full baseball activity, signs that a Friday return is likely for him as well. Adam Rosales received a start at shortstop in his stead on Wednesday.

Worth noting

- With each of the A's next six road games being played on turf, manager Bob Melvin plans on working in a few off-days for some of his players, including Jemile Weeks and Conor Jackson.

- Landon Powell received his 24th start of the season behind the plate on Wednesday, while Kurt Suzuki got the day off. Suzuki, who has just nine hits in his past 45 at-bats, is hitting .198 over his last 47 games.

A's depart Seattle with that swept-away feeling

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SEATTLE — The Oakland A's were feeling good coming to Seattle this week, believing the team was turning around.

It's still turning.

The Athletics lost, 7-4, on Wednesday, and were swept by their AL West rival for the first time since late in the 2009 season.

"As a team, we better be upset about the way we played here," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "We were coming off a good stretch where we played very well to come in here and get beat three games, by anybody, really. I'm hoping and guessing that everybody is upset about the way we played these three games."

Oakland entered the series after taking three of four from Tampa Bay and two of three from Minnesota but lost to the Mariners 8-4, 4-2 and 7-4.

Josh Willingham's three-run homer in the ninth inning made the final score look a lot closer than the game actually was.

"We're frustrated," third baseman Scott Sizemore said. "You never want to come in here and lose three in a row, especially when you feel like we're playing pretty good baseball."

The Mariners, who lost a club-record 17 straight games in July, won for the fifth time in their last seven.

Newly acquired Charlie Furbush (2-3) retired the first 13 batters during five strong innings and he was supported by stellar defense and a 14-hit attack.

It was just the third series sweep for the Mariners this season, the first since taking three from San Diego May 20-22.

Furbush did not allow a runner until Conor Jackson hit a double off the left-field wall that was inches away from being a home run and needed a video review.

Sizemore drove Jackson home with a double.

"He was mixing his pitches really well," Sizemore said. "He didn't double up on any of his pitches. If you saw fastball he was coming changeup or curveball with the next one. And vice versa. And he kept the ball down."

Later in the inning, Sizemore took the A's out of the rally with a baserunning mistake. He tried tagging on a flyout to center field but overslid third base. Third baseman Jack Wilson stayed with the slide and held the tag on him.

"I was safe if I stayed on the bag," Sizemore said. "I just have to make sure I do have to stay on if I'm going to take that chance. I think I played it right. I just didn't execute."

Josh Bard had the biggest of the Mariners' hits, a two-run single in the fourth off Gio Gonzalez (9-9), who is 1-4 with a 6.26 ERA in his last five starts. That broke a scoreless tie.

The loss ended Gonzalez' five-game win streak over the Mariners, dating to Sept. 6, 2009. He was 5-0 with a 2.52 ERA during that stretch.

In his 6 1-3 innings, he allowed 10 hits and six runs, walking four and striking out nine.

"I was putting people on base that shouldn't be on base. That is an easy way to give up runs," Gonzalez said. "I've got to continue to pound the strike zone and let them swing the bat and put it in play."

Trailing 7-1 entering the ninth, the A's rallied with Willingham's home run off Jeff Gray.

Dan Cortes came in to get one out, but walked Sizemore.

The Mariners had to hurry and warm up closer Brandon League. He came in to get Adam Rosales on a pop up and Ryan Sweeney to ground out.

League earned his 26th save in 30 opportunities.

Ichiro Suzuki had three singles, giving him 274 career hits against Oakland, second most ever by an opponent. He trails only Rod Carew (282). Suzuki is a .333 career hitter against the A's.

Hideki Matsui had a single in the ninth to extend his hitting streak to 12 games.

INJURY UPDATE

With an off-day Thursday, A's manager Bob Melvin expects that his two injured players, OF David DeJesus (sore thumb) and SS Cliff Pennington (Bell's Palsy), will be fit and available Friday in Tampa. Both worked in the cage before the game and are close to being ready.

The Big Lew Wolff Interview, Part 4

Marine Layer, newballpark.org

ML: Now lets move onto everyone's favorite topic – tarps. They've been a bone of contention ever since they've been up there. What have you learned from having them up there, whether they were an experiment or another initiative, do they help? Hurt? Does it even matter?

Actually, I want to go to your site. The doubleheader the other day. It was interesting. Somebody caught me the other day at the soccer game, he said, "Oh, I went to the doubleheader, I'm a Giant fan but it was so much fun." But in your own blog, there were a whole lot of comments saying, "Gee the (Coliseum crowd) looked great because the tarps were there."

ML: A lot of people said that.

There you are, I win, they (the critics) lose. Move on.

ML: [laughs] And it wasn't even a sellout. 27,000.

I know, but it would be better if the seats weren't there. Look, we have \$2 Wednesday and a \$1 hot dog. You personally have a problem with that. There's a limit of ten (hot dogs). [laughs]

ML: It's true. [Ed.: Years ago I once ate six dollar dogs in one sitting. I am no Joey Chestnut.]

I want to see the person who eats that. All kidding aside. Everybody's saying you have to open this or do that, make it cheaper and cheaper. We need revenue, yet nobody says, "Look how reasonable the A's game is compared to the Giants." Which is fine, they have a better environment to go to. You should pay more there.

ML: That actually gets me to something I've been thinking about for a while. All the discounts that are available. They're great and they allow families to come in (more frequently), but sometimes I wonder if there are too many discounts, that it devalues the product.

It definitely does. If everything is product – I'm not saying gouge people – but everything is product. I sort of get a kick out of Groupon. It's a big problem all sports and concerts, Stubhub and others. Somebody wrote an article in the LA Times where the people went to a Dodgers game for \$2.95, they got three seats. It's also in the hotel business – you've got all these sites like Expedia. I don't know where it's going but a lot of people go on StubHub. Sometimes they'll buy seats for triple. Sometimes they'll buy seats for a third. It's a very good point. Baseball's looking at it. The hotel is looking at it in a different way. Who owns the content and controls the price? We own the content. I'm not sure we control the price.

ML: The Tuesday free parking promotion that you've had for couple years. Monday's attendance was 11,000. Tuesday's was 12,000.

In the house Monday was 5,500. Tuesday was 8,000. I don't know if the parking was a factor.

ML: It doesn't seem like it has a lot of traction.

One of the problems is that we don't have (much to work with). I think our marketing group may be one of the best in baseball because they have such a challenge. It's fun to be at the Coliseum, but I don't know (beyond that). We try everything. The critics say, "Lew's trying to discourage fans." That's really not true. If they want to believe that it's fine.

Our revenues are around \$140-150 million. Our payroll is \$75 million. That's about right. I could name another team or two teams whose payroll is around \$40 million. We'd make a lot of money if we did that. I will not do that.

ML: The team you're playing right now (Tampa Bay).

They run pretty well. I was thinking of a different team.

[Ed. - Wolff demurred on naming the team.]

Over a time period, because of where they were in the standings, all of a sudden they got some terrific young players through the minors. Billy has kept us competitive, and he doesn't get as much credit as he should, but that leaves us in the middle of the draft. So where other teams get higher picks -

ML: Top ten pick.

That's never been my goal. I'm convinced that we will have a new stadium in 4-5 years. I hope it's here. I can't keep asking Billy and his guys to (deal with being a low revenue, low payroll team).

ML: In the past two years regarding player development, it seems you have gone in a different direction of going after international players, whether it's Michael Ynoa or Hisashi Iwakuma. Outside the draft. Is that some sort of new targeted strategy?

It's a strategy but it's not new. The big money teams. I don't have the exact figure, but in the last few months the Rangers have spent some \$20+ million in the Dominican Republic. *[Ed. - Technically this was \$23 million for three players, two from D.R. and one from Cuba.]*

If the new CBA has draft pick slotting and an international draft it'll be better for us. We can't go after free agents and pay somebody six years [trails off]. Last year we thought we had the makings of a pretty good team. We sat down with – and I personally was involved with Billy and David and Scott Boras – and we sat down with Adrian Beltre. We went down to Orange County and met with him. At the end of the day we offered somewhere over \$70 million for however many years, pretty much equal to what the Angels offered. Scott said, "No he's gonna get \$90 million." And Adrian was wonderful. We left and thought, "That's not what he's getting." And then Texas paid him.

We went after Lance Berkman, the (National) league leader in home runs. I didn't do that. Billy literally flew to his home and talked to him. We offered him 2 years at \$8 million (per year), I don't remember the exact figure. St. Louis only offered him one year at that. I don't like to blame on Oakland. For reasons of his own choosing, he decided to go to St. Louis. Those two players would've been very important to us. We went out and got other terrific players, free agents – DeJesus, Willingham,

and so forth. It's a little disappointing that the hitting (hasn't panned out). We're starting to look at our air conditioning (the marine layer). Why do they hit .280 (somewhere else) and then come here (and not hit)? We're starting to hit now, hitting's a little contagious.

So when fans say that we're trying to discourage and we're trying to make the product bad, they're wrong. We're doing the best we can. We send in a report every year about how we use revenue sharing. We don't put it in our pocket. Our best approach is to build through the minor leagues, drafting, and (hopefully) the international draft. That's our best chance of competing.

ML: Do you think that slotting and the international draft will be part of the next CBA?

I don't know. I hope so, I think it's good for everybody.

ML: I sure hope so. It's crazy that given all the reporting about big money payrolls being 2x, 3x, 4x the A's, it's sort of underreported how much development budgets make expenditures that much higher.

Well, we have no choice. So we have to use our money efficiently. So it isn't a matter of lowering your payroll for a major league team. In fact you have to use that extra money in the minor leagues – on the draft and so on.

ML: Could the A's to land a top tier free agent – say a slugger – next year or the year after that regardless of the ballpark situation? Would you take a shot at it?

We took a shot at Beltre. That was a six or five year deal. The answer is yes, but that isn't where we're going to get (that productivity). First of all, the probabilities of our being successful are limited. Boston, Texas, the Yankees – they can just offer another this or another that. We will not intentionally lose money because it's not good for baseball. It's not good for the team. We've tried everything. We got lucky once with Frank Thomas (in 2006).

The year we went to the playoffs, this is what scared me the most. My people told me, "Just you watch." Going into 2007, after we got to the ALCS, all we needed was another this or that (player). We had less season ticket sales going into 2007 (than in 2006). How is that possible? It's just a function of our market is shared. When all of these columnists report this and remember that, when we were playing in the Coliseum and the Giants were playing in Candlestick. That's a lot different today than it was then. They've got a beautiful new ballpark. We don't.

ML: That's really what it comes down to, doesn't it?

It's not totally that. I think our management talent is as good as anybody's. I tell you I've got owners all over the place who laughed I when I gave Billy and Mike (Crowley) long term contracts and shares of ownership. Now they're saying how smart (the deals) are. I don't know two other people, plus David (Forst) and Farhan (Zaidi), who could operate under the conditions that we have – which I'm not complaining about, they're just what they are – any better than those guys.

ML: Yeah. I'm not sure what else you can do other than hoping a lot of high draft picks all of sudden drop in your lap. That's not happening.

We'll be okay. We've got the trade deadline coming up. We're not looking to acquire anybody. We're not going to give away people just to reduce salary. We want to get something for that. I don't know how many teams are – so many teams have \$100+ million payroll that even if they're on the cusp of getting to the playoffs they may not be that interested. All of that accelerates from now until Sunday.

ML: If you get a really great offer that you can't refuse...

We'll look at it, but I like the way the team is playing now. Plus we'll get draft choices if we don't keep certain players. We're not in a panic position.

ML: No fire sale.

No fire sale. The nice thing about us, and you have to give Billy a lot of credit, one of my favorite all time keepers, not just a player, a keeper, is Mark Ellis. We have a young guy in Jemile Weeks who we hope to be our future. The only thing that we did was – Billy did this, I didn't even think about it – we wanted Mark to be in a position where he was playing all the time. *[Ed. - Ellis to Colorado trade]*

ML: Which he is now.

So that was sort of a below market deal, but it was good for him and we owed it to him.

ML: I think it had near universal praise for the way it was handled.

Selig told me never to fall in love with a player because they always move.

ML: Naw, we all loved Ellie.

That guy is so sweet and so decent. We've got quite a few but he's special.

ML: It's the great legacy of A's second basemen from Rapid City, SD. Like this stadium business, the radio saga dragged on much longer than it should have? What did you learn from that experience?

Again, the Giants have a better situation (because of KNBR). We didn't learn much. We learned that sometimes the people who administer bankruptcy, sometimes they get fees for that. Sometimes they don't operate in the best interest of the very people they're working for. The situation that came along in the middle of that (95.7 KBWF) was fine and we did it. It's not perfect but it's working out better than we thought. I was getting tired of listening to country music, and then the ballgame, and then a religious channel.

ML: Those were trying times. Let's go back to territorial rights. What is the best way you think this should be resolved?

Good. I always say that if I had a magic wand, we should share the territory.

ML: Flat out.

Just like all the other two-team markets. Your article is right. Santa Clara County was nobody's territory at one point. That's good information, it's true. I have seen the minutes of those meetings, and the Haases were complemented for being cooperative. The reason that happened was to build a ballpark in San Jose. I was even active in that as a businessman. I had no thoughts in ever being involved in baseball. For the Giants to say they have the territory but they didn't mean to – I just think we should share the market like the other teams. Theoretically the Angels could move right next to the Dodgers if they want.

ML: They could but it'd be crazy.

The Mets could move next to Yankee Stadium. The White Sox could move across town. They're not going to but it's allowed. And we're further from the other team than any other. *[Ed. - Again, not including DC/BAL]* The whole thing in an academic sense, I can't imagine the debate.

ML: Do you think the owners understand this? Do you have to talk to them or lobby them about this?

I made up my mind not to lobby them. Over this long period of time they'll tease me a little bit about it. In fact several have told me, "I'll talk to Bud for you." I say no. It's being done the way it's supposed to be and let's just see what happens. Running around and lobbying, I just don't do that. It's just not worth it. First of all, everyone's going to go along pretty much with the commissioner's decision.

ML: What's your confidence level right now that this will get done by the end of the year?

In your lifetime? I have a lot of confidence that it'll be done this year, but I said that last year too.

ML: Right.

Who knew that baseball would explode in two or three other areas? I still have a high degree of confidence that we'll get an answer one way or the other. That's all I'm asking for. I mean, I want a yes for sharing. In lieu of that I'll take a no.

ML: Do you have a hard stop or a deadline for getting this done?

Yes. We missed it by two years. [laughs]

ML: There you go.

The answer is no, not now I don't. As I say, I'll pass the baton to those who are working on it. We're working on this everyday. We're talking about sight lines and everything. We just haven't pulled the trigger to spend because we want to know it's there (first).

ML: Okay.

Silver Hawks infielder Gallego helps out during making of movie

By CURT RALLO South Bend Tribune Staff Writer

Chad Kreuter saw enough actors bobble ground balls and throw to the wrong base that it got to the point where he couldn't hold back anymore.

A former major leaguer who was the head coach at Southern California and a coach in the Arizona Diamondbacks organization, Kreuter was hired as an advisor for the movie "Moneyball," the story of how Billy Beane turned the Oakland Athletics into contenders using computer analysis and astute economics. The movie, based on the book by Michael Lewis, stars Brad Pitt and is scheduled for release in September.

When more than 200 people arrived for a tryout to be in the movie's baseball scenes, Kreuter quickly realized that about 90 percent of the lot were actors, and only a few had a clue about playing baseball.

Kreuter then turned to director Bennett Miller and said, "We're going to be spinning our wheels all day unless you let me send some guys out of here."

Kreuter started hitting grounders to the actors and quickly sent them packing once they bobbled their chance. He brought in baseball players who were living in the Los Angeles area last fall -- including current South Bend Silver Hawks infielder Niko Gallego and former Silver Hawk Ollie Linton -- to be baseball players in the movie.

"(The director) needed to fill out a roster of players, ranging from major leaguers like Scott Hatteburg and David Justice, to high school players," Kreuter said. "We used mainly former baseball players as the actors. Miguel Tejada was played by Royce Clayton. So you had an all-star shortstop playing an all-star shortstop.

"They originally didn't want Royce, but once they saw that he could make some of the plays that were going to be shown, they went with him," Kreuter said. "They previewed for me some of the actual plays that they wanted to incorporate into the movie. I said, 'Hey, only a big-league shortstop can make that play. If you want it to look real, here's what we're going to do.' Bennett Miller, the director, really wanted to try to incorporate realism into the movie. He didn't want a baseball movie where the baseball being played looked terrible on film."

Gallego and Linton played the role of high school players on a team that included a young Billy Beane.

"It was really exciting and fun," Gallego said of his movie experience. "We had a great time. We got to be movie stars for a day, and we got paid pretty well. Luckily, we get our name in the credits. That will be cool to see. Hopefully, people will catch a glimpse of us, but it wasn't a big role."

Gallego and Linton found out that the magic of movies is hard work.

"It gets real repetitive," Gallego said. "It was a 12-hour day, and all they were trying to do was get one scene. They're going to take about five minutes of the 12 hours we did. You'd do a cut perfectly, and you think you had it, and the director didn't like something about it, or he just wants to see it again. You re-do the same scene over and over. Luckily, we had a great bunch of guys there. The pro players, a lot of us knew each other, so we were having fun with it.

"Our goal was to make that actor playing the young Billy Beane (Reed Thompson) look like he was a better player than all the professional players who were out there," Gallego continued. "It was tough. There were about 12 to 15 professional baseball guys. It was a movie set. There were people sitting in the stands getting paid \$25. It was interesting to see. It was intense. The director would yell at the actors. You didn't want to be in the wrong spot, because they were going to get into you."

Gallego said that Thompson was great to work with in filming the baseball scenes.

"It was cool to hear what he had to say and how much he's been through," Gallego said. "This is his big break. He was very excited. He was working hard out there to make it look real, and it was hard for him, because he wasn't much of a ballplayer at all."

For Gallego, it all came full circle when he got a call from his father, former major leaguer and current Oakland Athletics third base coach Mike Gallego.

"They filmed a few scenes in Oakland," Gallego said. "My dad got to see Brad Pitt and some of the other actors filming at the Coliseum. He called me up and said, 'Hey, I saw your movie being made here.'"

Kreuter said that getting the baseball part of it right by using players like Gallego was important. It was easier to teach baseball players to act, according to Kreuter, and he worked extensively with the actors who had to be in baseball scenes.

"They wanted the baseball to be spot on, or as close to spot on as possible, and have a great story to go with it," Kreuter said of the director Miller and his crew. "They didn't want the baseball world to be cringing when they saw the baseball on film. They're filming for a world-wide audience, and 99 percent of the world doesn't care about baseball or know about baseball. The one percent who do know about baseball, we're the only ones seeing a guy throwing to the wrong base on a ground ball.

"In the past, they haven't been so worried about that, because they're worried about the story line, but Bennett Miller did a great job of saying we're going to make this one of the great baseball movies," Kreuter said. "He deserves a lot of credit for that. Unfortunately, there have been a ton of baseball movies where the baseball being played was awful."

As for Gallego, he doesn't foresee a walk down the red carpet on some future Academy Awards night.

"I'm going to try to work my way to the big leagues," Gallego said. "It looks like an easier path than acting."

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento has 6-game win streak ended

Sacramento River Cats

Clint Robinson gave Omaha the lead for good with a two-run homer in the fourth inning as visiting Sacramento fell 3-2 at Werner Park. It was Robinson's 19th homer of the season.

Sacramento had its six-game winning streak snapped.

Sacramento starter Carlos Hernandez allowed three runs over 7.0 innings, striking out six. The left-hander has allowed three runs or less in each of his last nine starts.

Omaha shortstop Lance Zawadzki committed three errors in the third inning, allowing both River Cats runs to score unearned. The River Cats held that lead for one inning, before Robinson gave the Storm Chasers the lead.

Michael Taylor went 3-for-4 with a double for Sacramento.

Thursday night, Sacramento right-hander Tyson Ross (0-1, 14.04) faces Omaha right-hander Vin Mazzaro (5-1, 4.97) at 5:05 p.m.

Frisco holds on for win against RockHounds

Jordan Mason, Midland Reporter-Telegram

After a back-and-forth start to the game, it was only fitting that the Midland RockHounds give one last push even when the Frisco RoughRiders seemed to have a win locked up in the seventh.

Midland loaded the bases with no outs in the ninth but only came away with one run as Frisco was able to hold on for the 6-3 road win.

"Whatever we did they did the same thing or better," Frisco third baseman Tommy Mendonca said. "It's a happy-sad feeling because you think you're doing good and then they come back with the exact same thing or even better."

Midland ultimately wasn't able to match a three-run spurt in the seventh powered by Medonca's two-run blast to left.

The RoughRiders (21-18) drew first blood on a Mitch Hilligoss RBI single in the second, but Ryan Ortiz answered it in the third by ripping an RBI double down the left field line to even the game at one.

Midland (19-20) had a chance to go up later in the inning when Stephen Parker blooped a single into left and RockHounds manager Steve Scarsone waved Matt Sulentic home from second.

Sulentic avoided catcher Jose Felix's tag but missed the plate, allowing Felix to make the out to end the inning with the game still knotted up at one.

The next inning was a long one for Ortiz, starting when Hollingsworth struck out Jonathan Greene on three pitches. However, the final pitch was in the dirt and Ortiz' throw to first sailed over Adam Heether's head, allowing Greene to reach second on the RockHounds' second error of the night.

"That's probably more frustrating than the loss," Scarsone said of his team's three errors. "We're playing pretty solid, and it just kind of seemed like we took a step backward a bit in that aspect."

It didn't take long for the play to haunt the RockHounds when, after a sacrifice bunt, Greene crossed the plate on a Hilligoss groundout to put his team up 2-1.

The RockHounds, though, caught a break of their own in the bottom of the inning when Adam Heether reached on a routine ground ball that Stoneburner bobbled and was late on the throw.

Midland got its own unearned run when Barfield chopped one just past shortstop Renny Osuna for an RBI single to tie the game at two.

The RockHounds again had an opportunity to go up later in the inning, but Ortiz's long night continued as he hit into a 6-4-3 double play with the bases loaded to end the inning.

Jose Ruiz gave the RoughRiders a slim lead with his RBI single in the fifth before Mendonca came to the plate in the fifth looking to atone for his 0-for-3 start.

"Just trying to hit the ball, hit it hard on the ground," Mendonca said of his mindset. "And that just so happened."

"That" was Mendonca's 22nd home run of the season, which busted the game open 5-2 in favor of the visitors.

The Frisco bullpen seemed to have the game put away heading into the ninth, but Midland made it interesting by immediately loading the bases with no outs.

Ortiz then went down 0-2, battled back to a full count, then hit into a 4-6-3 double play for the second time Wednesday, which allowed a run to score but virtually ended all hope for a rally.

"They're a pretty good club," Scarsone said. "You're not going to get them every time."

The RockHounds will try to rebound and win the series against Frisco in the final game of their seven-game homestand at 7 p.m. today.

'HOUND BITES: RockHounds second baseman Wes Timmons extended his hit streak to 11 games Wednesday with a leadoff single in the ninth. Timmons was 0-for-3 with a strikeout heading into the ninth before belting a base hit to left to extend his streak. ... With the loss, Midland missed a golden opportunity to gain on Frisco for second place in the second-half Texas League South race. The RockHounds trail Frisco by three games and first-place San Antonio by five. ... The Oakland A's have assigned left-handed pitcher Lenny DiNardo to Midland. DiNardo has made nearly 100 Major League appearances over six seasons but has played with Triple-A Sacramento since signing with the A's in May.

TODAY'S PROBABLES: Gary Daley (4-4, 4.68) is expected to take the hill today for the RockHounds while lefthander Robbie Ross is expected to make his first Double-A start for Frisco.

Ports Snap Losing Streak with 7-1 Win

Stockton Ports

After five losses, the Stockton Ports snagged a 7-1 win in the series opener at home against the Visalia Rawhide. Ports starter Rob Gilliam pitching a solid outing, allowing just one run while the Ports jumped ahead and then built onto their lead in the eighth, ensuring their victory.

Gilliam was off to a great start in the first, retiring the first three batters he faced. It looked as if he would do it again in the second, but with two outs, Gilliam walked three batters to load the bases. He would get out of it unscathed in the end, with the strike out of left fielder Ryan LaPensee.

Stockton would get a run on the board first, in the bottom of the second. With one out, Rashun Dixon singled to left-center, and first baseman Anthony Aliotti was hit by a pitch. With runners on first and second, third baseman Leonardo Gil and designated hitter Jason Christian hit back-to-back RBI singles, giving the Ports a 2-0 lead.

Gilliam would get in and out of trouble again in the third. Center fielder Keon Broxton reached on a single, advanced to second on a ground out by shortstop Chris Owings, and stole third with second baseman David Nick at the plate. Gilliam struck out Nick before walking first baseman Matt Davidson to put runners on the corners with two away. Third baseman Bobby Borchering came to the plate and flew out to right to end the inning without a Visalia run scoring.

In the home half of the third, the Ports would get another run on a solo home run by catcher Petey Paramore, a line-shot over the left field wall.

The Ports would go down in order at the hand of Visalia starter David Holmberg in the fourth. Gilliam would respond by retiring three in a row as well in the fifth. Visalia would get a run back in the sixth. Davidson walked, followed by a single for Borchering. Another single by right fielder Alfredo Marte would bring Davidson in to score. That would be the only run allowed in the inning, as designated hitter Brent Greer bunted a pop-up in front of the mound, caught by Aliotti, and LaPensee and catcher Rossmel Perez both flew out to Conner Crumbliss in center field.

After six innings of work, Gilliam would make way for Omar Duran on the hill for Stockton. Gilliam gave up just one run on three hits. Duran would retire each of his three batters in his one inning of work. Holmberg would also come out after six, having given up three runs on five hits. He would be replaced on the hill by Mike Belfiore.

In the eighth, Josh Lansford would take Duran's place on the mound. After starting off with a strike out, Lansford got into some trouble when both Borchering and Marte singled. Greer came to the plate and hit a blooper to shallow right field and Aliotti made a spectacular catch to save a hit and a possible run.

Second baseman Michael Gilmartin would lead off the bottom of the eighth with a double into the right field corner. That would spell the end for Belfiore, bringing Cristian Beltre in to pitch for Visalia. Beltre struck out Paramore before shortstop Dusty Coleman beat out a ground ball to shortstop, advancing Gilmartin to third. Both would score on a single by Dixon. Aliotti would walk, followed by another RBI single by Gil. Christian would fly out, allowing Aliotti to score, putting the Ports up 7-1.

Jose Guzman would come in to close for the Ports. LaPensee would lead off with a single, but Guzman would get a strike out and draw two grounders to end the game.

The Ports look to win two in a row tomorrow night as Ports lefty Jake Brown takes the mound against the Diamondbacks highly touted prospect Trevor Bauer at 7:05 p.m.

Chiefs Take Game Two

By Jon Versteeg, Burlington Bees

PEORIA, IL-The Peoria Chiefs (14-24) scored five runs on eight hits to earn a 5-2 win over the Burlington Bees (12-26) at O'Brien Field in Peoria on Wednesday night in game two of the four-game series.

The Bees scored a single run in the third inning against Peoria LHP Frank Del Valle (1-2). SS Yordy Cabrera (0-3) led off the inning with a walk and stole both second and third base. CF Tyreece House (1-3) hit an opposite-field single to right field to drive in Cabrera for a 1-0 lead.

The Chiefs tied the game with an unearned run in the fourth inning against Burlington RHP Josh Bowman (7-4). 3B Dustin Geiger (0-1) was hit by a pitch and moved to second base on a single by RF Anthony Giansanti (2-4). SS Rafael Valdes (0-4) followed by hitting into a fielder's choice. Geiger scored from third on a throwing error by 3B Tony Thompson for a 1-1 tied score.

Peoria scored two runs in the fifth inning to take a 3-1 lead. RF Ben Klafczynski (1-4) singled and went to second base on a single by CF Taiwan Easterling (1-3). 2B Rubi Silva (1-3) laid down a sacrifice bunt to move both runners into scoring position. Geiger hit a sacrifice fly to center field to score Klafczynski. 1B Richard Jones (2-4) hit an RBI single to plate Easterling for the two-run lead.

Burlington scored one run in the sixth inning. 2B Wade Kirkland (1-4) singled and moved to second base on a single by 1B Josh Whitaker (3-4). DH A.J. Kirby-Jones (1-4) singled and Kirkland scored to cut the lead to 3-2. The Bees ran into some "bad luck" when 3B Tony Thompson (1-4) lined a ball that was clearly ticketed for left field. Whitaker, who was running from

second to third base, was hit with the ball. He was immediately ruled out and the Bees ended the inning with just one run scoring.

The Chiefs scored two runs in the seventh inning to take a 5-2 lead.

The Bees and Chiefs play game three of their series on Thursday night at 7:00 p.m. RHP Jose Macias (3-3, 5.67) gets the start for Burlington against RHP Brett Wallach (3-5, 5.74 High A Dayton) for Peoria. Pre-game coverage begins at 6:40 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.

State College Holds Off Vermont 5-3

By Paul Stanfield / Vermont Lake Monsters

BURLINGTON, VT --- Taylor Lewis went 3-for-4 with two runs and a triple as the State College Spikes used a four-run third inning to beat the Vermont Lake Monsters 5-3 in New York-Penn League action Wednesday night at historic Centennial Field.

Vermont took a 2-0 lead with a pair of first inning runs as Sean Jamieson scored from second base on a Bobby Crocker infield single and two-base throwing error by pitcher Ryan Hafner. Chad Lewis followed with a line drive RBI single to right scoring Crocker with the second run.

But the Spikes struck for four runs on four hits in the third inning off Lake Monsters starter J.C. Menna. Lewis led off with a line drive triple to rightcenter and scored on a Walker Gourley RBI single to cut the deficit in half. Wes Freeman followed with a line drive double down the leftfield line scoring Gourley with the tying run. Freeman later scored on an Alex Dickerson sacrifice fly and Alex Fuselier an unearned run on a Matt Skirving infield single.

State College added a run in the seventh as Lewis led off with a single, stole second, moved to third on a Gourley single and scored when Freeman bounced into a double play. The Lake Monsters got a run back in the bottom of the seventh as Jamieson walked, stole second and scored on a Chih-Fang Pan RBI double.

Hafner (1-3) allowed two runs (one earned) on five hits over five innings for his first win of the season, while Menna (2-4) four runs (three earned) on five hits over five innings for the loss. Gourley and Freeman both had two hits for State College (16-30), while Chad Oberacker and Aaron Shipman two hits apiece for Vermont (24-21).

Vermont wraps up its seven-game homestand on Thursday against State College at a special start time of 11:05 am. Waterbottles will be given out to the first 1,000 kids in attendance courtesy of Pizza Putt and Star 92.9 FM.