

Oakland A's David DeJesus is out to stop his slide

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

TORONTO -- It's been tough to make sense of David DeJesus' first season with the A's, which is shaping up offensively as the worst of his nine-year major league career.

A .289 hitter coming into the season, DeJesus is batting just .234 with seven homers and 32 RBIs in 97 games entering Tuesday's series opener at Toronto. Even those numbers are deceiving.

DeJesus has posted three two-homer games in 2011 -- May 4 against Cleveland, May 24 against the Angels in Anaheim and Saturday at Tampa Bay. Set those aside, and the A's right fielder has combined for just one homer and 24 RBIs in his other 94 games.

That lack of production has contributed to Oakland's offensive woes, especially taking into account that DeJesus began the season hitting third.

Though the A's lead the majors in hitting (.299) and slugging percentage (.473) since the All-Star break, their poor offense before the break is largely the reason they fell from American League West contention early.

"I've definitely had better years," DeJesus, 31, said. "But I've learned lessons about the mental side of baseball. You have one good game and then a couple bad games, and sometimes you take the bad games into the next game. It's learning how to manage that, having confidence in yourself."

When the A's acquired DeJesus from Kansas City in November, sending pitchers Vin Mazzaro and Justin Marks to the Royals, they envisioned a player with occasional power, above average speed and someone who could hit in the clutch.

DeJesus hit below .281 just once in eight seasons with Kansas City, and he led the majors with a .419 average with runners in scoring position in 2008.

A left-handed hitter, DeJesus also hit left-handed pitching well with Kansas City, notching a .302 average against lefties in 2008 and a .290 mark in 2009. He hit .258 against lefties in 2010, when he played just 91 games because of right thumb surgery.

This year, DeJesus has struggled mightily against lefties, batting .172 (16 for 93) with one homer and six RBIs.

One major league scout said he sees a regression in DeJesus' game.

"I thought he looked stronger and more aggressive at the plate in the past," said the scout, who requested anonymity. "I thought he ran better. I don't know if his body is getting old fast, but there has definitely been a step back."

But A's manager Bob Melvin is encouraged by DeJesus' recent play. After missing three games with soreness in his surgically repaired thumb, DeJesus went 6 for 14 in three games against the Rays last weekend, including the two homers Saturday. He had three hits against tough Rays lefty David Price on Sunday.

"Hopefully this is a sign of things to come," Melvin said. "It's not like he's 40 years old. He's still a young guy and a talented player. At end of this year, it's going to look like an off-year for him, but there's still time left to do good things."

A strong finish would bode well for DeJesus, who is a free agent after the season, as are Oakland's other two starting outfielders, Coco Crisp and Josh Willingham.

Willingham leads the team in homers (17) and RBIs (63), and it's logical to think the A's will consider re-signing him. Crisp, who led the American League with 37 steals entering Monday, also could merit consideration.

DeJesus appears the least likely to return, but A's general manager Billy Beane said he will wait until after the season to decide on impending free agents.

DeJesus said he's doing his best not to look beyond this season.

"I still have a month-and-a-half left," he said, "and I'm just going to go out there and keep grinding and be a guy that they can count on."

A's Michael Taylor biding time in Triple-A

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Toronto -- The trade deadline was not Michael Taylor's friend.

There'd been speculation that one or two of Oakland's three free-agent-to-be outfielders might get moved by July 31, but the day came and went and the A's still had a full set of outfielders.

"That was the toughest day of the year for me," Triple-A Sacramento outfielder Taylor said by phone. "So much had been building toward the deadline, and nothing happened. And you know you'll be in the minor leagues at least another month. You have to just continue to work and try to force their hand to make a decision."

Taylor has done his best to do that - since the deadline passed, the Stanford alum is 11-for-26 (.423).

The only way Taylor might get recalled before rosters expand Sept. 1, however, is if the A's make a waiver deal - which is always possible, especially with the club well out of the AL West race. There's speculation in the Japanese media that designated hitter Hideki Matsui fits the profile of a potential waiver target.

Oakland has several other young players who might warrant a look before September, too, including recently acquired first baseman Brandon Allen, and Oakland general manager Billy Beane mentioned another Sacramento outfielder, Jai Miller, as a player who has put himself into the conversation with an excellent season.

Then there's the team's power hope, Chris Carter, who is seen as the future designated hitter - if he proves he can hit big-league pitching. At some point, the A's are going to have to determine that.

"He's still very young and it's not like he's out of options," Beane said. "It's not like there's a sense of now-or-never with him, and he did miss part of the season with an injury."

With the A's fortunes dimming for 2011, many fans clamor to see the prospects with Oakland sooner rather than later, but it's not that simple, according to Beane. Big-league teams are competitive, and this is a club that hasn't had a winning season since 2006. That would count for something, particularly with an interim manager, Bob Melvin, hoping to make a good showing.

"There is a lot of season left," Beane said by phone from Burlington, Vt., where he is visiting the A's short-season A-ball team. "Regardless of where we are now, it is important to win as many games as we can. I don't think we can turn the roster over just for development purposes."

In some sense, however, trying to win might be almost counterproductive. The worse the record at the end of the season, the higher the draft pick. A mediocre finish means a mediocre pick. An awful finish means a top pick.

"That's the Gordian knot," Beane said. "But you can't make (losing) part of your plan, and the guys are still playing hard. We feel good about going with what we have."

With an extra infielder right now, the A's have some roster flexibility should they want to bring up Allen on the next homestand, but it's also possible that they'd go back to an eight-man bullpen and recall Joey Devine.

Devine allowed a run on two hits in two-thirds of an inning in the River Cats' 8-0 loss at Iowa on Monday night. Both of his outs were strikeouts.

A's Hideki Matsui back to being 'Godzilla'

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

A month ago, designated hitter **Hideki Matsui** seemed as if he might be playing his final season in the big leagues. At the All-Star break, he was batting .209.

Since then, Matsui, 38, has been on an extraordinary roll, going 37-for-82 (.451) in 21 games. He's riding a season-high 15-game hitting streak that includes 13 RBIs and four homers. He has gone from struggling mightily to Mr. Reliable.

"What we're seeing now, we expect all the time," manager **Bob Melvin** said. "When he's up there, we expect him to get a hit. It's not just me, it's everyone on the bench. We're surprised when he gets just one hit in a game."

Suddenly it appears as if Matsui's career might continue, but Matsui, always even keel, isn't getting too far ahead of himself.

"I'm not really thinking about next year," he said through interpreter **Roger Kahlon**. "There's a little under two months left. We'll see how things pan out."

Would he have interest in coming back to the A's? Oakland has **Chris Carter** as a potential DH at some point, but he remains unproven, plus Matsui has shown that he is still a solid outfielder now that his knees are healthy.

"I haven't thought beyond this season," he said, "but on the other hand, I like this organization and I like my teammates."

General manager **Billy Beane** said that any decisions on the A's looming free-agent crop will come after the season, but he said of Matsui's streak, "It's been a remarkable turnaround, considering where he was a few weeks ago, and it shows how much he means to the lineup when he's swinging well, because the offense has picked up significantly."

Briefly: Top pick **Sonny Gray** worked two innings at rookie-ball Arizona on Sunday and allowed four hits and one run while striking out two. He will report to Double-A Midland this week. ... Class A Stockton outfielder **Michael Choice** returned Sunday after missing two weeks with a hamstring strain. On Monday, he hit his 28th homer of the season in a 14-7 loss to Rancho Cucamonga.

LEADING OFF

Second-half perfection: Closer Andrew Bailey has converted all five of his save opportunities since the All-Star break - and in his career, post-break, Bailey has saved all of his 28 chances. In his nine appearances since this year's break, Bailey has a 1.08 ERA.

Young hurlers getting lessons in finishing strong

All-Stars Gonzalez, Cahill have hit rough patches since break

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

Oakland's second-half surge, at least on the offensive side, has been well-documented.

Josh Willingham's power has been a steady presence and Hideki Matsui's production has provided a needed boost. Overall, the club is batting a Major League-leading .299 since the All-Star break en route to a respectable 12-10 record.

But on the mound, where consistency usually reigns supreme on a pitching-heavy A's team, such steadiness has been missing -- particularly from two hurlers who for so long were so good.

All-Stars Gio Gonzalez and Trevor Cahill, shared owners of a 2.80 ERA before the break, have combined for a 7.05 mark in eight starts that have followed and have garnered just two wins. Neither, not to mention any of their rotation mates, enters the week with a winning record.

The "Jekyll and Hyde" showing in Oakland has raised plenty of questions regarding the aforementioned pitchers' regression. But the answer doesn't come in the form of a quick fix, insists pitching coach Ron Romanick, who is adamant that such struggles are in no way the result of mechanical issues.

"These guys haven't missed a start, so they're learning how to get through the rest of the season," Romanick said. "Their [arms aren't] going to feel great every single day, and we're trying to adjust their programs for that."

Both pitchers rank among the top 26 American League starters in innings pitched, with Cahill at 153 1/3 innings and Gonzalez currently at 136 1/3 -- putting them on track for a second consecutive season to land around the 200-inning plateau.

Such a feat is not uncommon, with several pitchers soaring above that mark by season's end each year. But reaching it, especially as a youngster -- Cahill is just 23, Gonzalez 25 -- is no easy task. And the final starts that lead up to it -- like those that come in the grinding months of August and September -- serve as the utmost test.

"They have to mentally push through August, and then in September, they can kind of kick to the finish there and exit the season strong, and take that into next year," Romanick said. "The learning curve still goes on with these guys, as do the expectations. You can see them tiring, but these starts -- the ones they still have left -- will make them better pitchers, no matter the results."

The numbers are hard to ignore, though. In Gonzalez's past three outings, spanning 16 1/3 innings, the left-hander has a total of 16 earned runs, 26 hits and 10 walks attached to his name.

"You've got to throw strikes," the lefty said. "I have to continue to pound the strike zone, let them swing the bats and put it in play. I haven't been doing that the way I know I can."

Walks, rather, have continued to plague Gonzalez. He has issued 64 on the season after compiling 92 -- second most in the AL -- in 2010. The only AL pitcher who has offered up more free passes this season is Cahill, who has a career-high 66 walks after surrendering just 63 all of last season. Moreover, 17 of them have come in the second half, accounting for 26 percent of his 2011 total.

Further frustration has mounted when the walks come in pressure situations, or with two outs. Nearly half of Cahill's walks (30) have followed a pair of outs -- most in the AL -- while Gonzalez is close behind with 24.

"With Trevor, it seems the days he gets knocked around a little bit, the ball is up, and he needs to pitch down in the zone," manager Bob Melvin said. "He's never really had a high percentage of strikes in his career, but he has a good mix of pitches and can make pitches when he has to. But when the ball's up and he gets behind, that's when we're seeing the hits and the walks."

The focus for both hurlers, then, revolves around not just the final results, but those that come from game-changing situations.

"I run all their numbers -- the stuff that doesn't necessarily show up in the box score -- to make sure they're throwing enough strikes," Romanick said. "I want them to see something for what it is. You look at the box score and say, 'Well, Trevor had a bad game.' Well, sure, maybe he didn't get what he needed out of that game, but a pitch here, a pitch there, he minimized one run or two, and that's what good pitchers learn how to do. The box score doesn't really tell you that, so you have to tell them to keep their mindset on the situational stuff."

"Gio's the same -- work ahead in the count, don't let guys beat you that aren't supposed to beat you," Romanick added. "The bottom line is winning baseball games -- we all understand that -- but don't try to be something you're not and don't let your opponents get in your head."

The A's, with 48 games remaining as they head to Toronto for a three-game set with the Blue Jays beginning Tuesday, will look to use that time to click on all cylinders, with Gonzalez and Cahill's performances playing a large role in that.

"When you press and all you see is the bottom-line result, you're not understanding the process for it," Romanick said. "You can actually work on things when you're going good, but if you're not going good, you have to go back to your routine. It's a war with these guys and it's not going to get any easier, but we know what they're capable of, and it's also our job -- whether by tweaking the volume of throwing they do or whatever -- to make sure they can be at their best."

A's head north of the border to battle Blue Jays

TORONTO (AP) -- Toronto Blue Jays rookie third baseman Brett Lawrie is thrilled about playing in front of the hometown fans for the first time.

Given his struggles in Toronto, fellow British Columbia native Rich Harden probably isn't as excited about heading north of the border with the Oakland Athletics.

The Blue Jays open a three-game series Tuesday night against an A's team trying to match a season high with its third straight road win.

Acquired from Milwaukee in the offseason for Shaun Marcum, Lawrie made his major league debut Friday and was 5 for 11 during a three-game set in Baltimore. He went 2 for 4 with his first homer in Sunday's 7-2 victory.

"Now I know I can stick and I can play with these guys," the former first-round pick said. "I knew I could before, but it's just a question of me getting the opportunity."

Now, the 17th Canadian in Blue Jays history is set to make his Rogers Centre debut as Toronto (58-56) opens a six-game homestand. The Blue Jays, who took two of three from the visiting A's (51-63) from April 5-7, are 10-4 in their last 14 home games.

"Obviously back in Canada it's going to be pretty cool," Lawrie said after getting called up from Triple-A Las Vegas. "I've got to do my best to represent my country and myself and the Toronto Blue Jays."

It could make for an exciting matchup if Lawrie faces Harden (2-2, 4.63 ERA) in his first home at-bat, but with the young third baseman hitting ninth, that might not take place if the A's right-hander doesn't have better stuff than his previous outings in Toronto.

Harden is 0-2 with a 13.50 ERA in three starts visiting the Blue Jays. In his last start at Rogers Centre on May 14, 2010, he didn't receive a decision after walking six and surrendering six runs in 2 2-3 innings of a 16-10 loss for Texas.

He is 0-3 with a 5.74 ERA in eight starts versus Toronto.

Harden has surrendered at least one home run in each of his six starts this season, and that could be a problem with the Blue Jays ranked fourth in the AL with 70 homers at home.

Major league home run leader Jose Bautista, who increased his total to 33 with two on the just-completed trip, gets his first look at the A's after missing the April series due to the birth of his first daughter.

Bautista is a .151 hitter with one homer and two RBIs in 14 games versus the A's.

Blue Jays left-hander Brett Cecil (4-4, 4.35) would appreciate more production than that as he makes his eighth start since a two-month stint at Triple-A.

Cecil, 3-2 with a 3.28 ERA since returning, will try to win his fourth straight decision after giving up three runs over six innings in Thursday's 7-6, 12-inning loss to Tampa Bay.

He is 2-0 with a 2.40 ERA in two starts against Oakland, both coming during his 2009 rookie season.

Cecil should be careful against Hideki Matsui, who is 5 for 8 with two homers and a double off him. Matsui is batting .483 (29 for 60) during a 15-game hitting streak after hitting a two-run shot in Sunday's 5-4, 10-inning road win over the Rays.

The A's, who dropped 30 of 37 on the road before taking the last two in Tampa, have lost 11 of 14 at Toronto.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento loses third in a row

By Zeke Fine / Sacramento River Cats

The River Cats suffered a tough loss on Monday night, losing to the Iowa Cubs, 8-0. This was their third time being shut out this season and first time on the road.

The game got off to a quick start, as the first four batters to come to the plate struck out swinging.

No runs were scored until the bottom of the fifth inning. Matthew Spencer led off for the Cubs and singled to center field, and advanced to second on an error by center fielder Jermaine Mitchell. Spencer advanced to third on a groundout and was driven in on a single by Marwin Gonzalez to give the Cubs the only run they would need and make the score 1-0.

The Cubs came back in the sixth inning to break the game open, scoring six runs to give them a 7-0 lead. After striking out the first batter of the inning, Carlos Hernandez (6-5, 4.84) gave up four consecutive hits, and was charged for five earned runs in the inning. He was relieved by Joey Devine with one out.

After allowing one earned run in his first 5.0 innings pitched, Hernandez was charged with a total of six earned runs on 11 on six hits and one walk while striking out three over 5.1 innings of work.

Chris Rusin (4-6, 2.67) kept the River Cats hitters off balanced all night. Over 7.0 innings, Rusin did not give up a run, allowing six hits while collecting a career high 11 strikeouts. Only two River Cats were able to get into scoring position off Rusin.

Despite Sacramento's offensive woes, Brandon Allen was able to turn in a quality performance for the River Cats. Allen was the only River Cat to get an extra-base hit, going 3-for-4 with a triple and a double. He also had a leaping catch in the fifth inning that prevented two runs from scoring with men on second and third and one out. Michael Taylor was able to extend his hitting streak to seven games, going 1-for-4 at the plate with a single and a strikeout.

The River Cats will look to exact their revenge on the Cubs on Tuesday at Principal Park at 5:05 p.m. Tyson Ross (0-1, 10.95) of the River Cats will face Nick Struck (2-3, 3.97) of the Cubs.

Hollingsworth leads RockHounds to 5th straight win

Staff Reports, Midland Reporter-Telegram

CORPUS CHRISTI -- The Midland RockHounds extended their recent win streak to five games with a 1-0 nail-biting victory against the Corpus Christi Hooks on Monday night at Whataburger Field.

The shutout was the RockHounds' first since May 23 when they blanked the Hooks, 3-0.

The victory, though, didn't help Midland (24-20) in the Texas League South Division's second half standings as San Antonio took a 3-1 victory against Frisco on Monday night and the RockHounds were still four games back in second place.

Meanwhile in Corpus Christi on Monday, the RockHounds scored the lone run of the game during their half of the seventh.

Midland put relief pitcher Henry Villar under pressure from the beginning of the inning when Wes Timmons drew a leadoff walk and Michael Spina followed with a single to left to move Timmons to second.

Mitch Canham laid down a bunt but Villar was able to throw out Timmons at third with two runners still on base.

After a fly out by Tyler Ladendorf for the second out, Matt Sulentic lined a ground-rule double to right that scored Spina. The RockHounds loaded the bases later in the inning but could not convert as they left a total of 10 runners on base during the game.

Meanwhile, the Rockhounds' pitching staff had a solid performance as starter Ethan Hollingsworth pitched 7 1/3 innings, giving up one run on seven hits with two walks and six strikeouts for the victory.

Meanwhile, relievers Trey Barham and Jared Lansford combined to not allow a hit over the final 1 2/3 innings as Lansford recorded his sixth save of the season.

The RockHounds will take today off and then try to extend their winning streak at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday against Tulsa at Citibank Ballpark.

Quakes Earn Payback with 14-7 Win

Stockton Ports

It was a completely different game tonight between the Stockton Ports and the visiting Rancho Cucamonga Quakes, the Quakes coming back from their shutout to win game two of this series 14-7. On any other night, the Ports' seven runs on 10 hits might have been enough, but the Quakes' 14 runs on 18 hits would completely overshadow Stockton's effort.

The Quakes jumped ahead very early with a five-run first inning. Center fielder Nick Buss and shortstop Jake Lemmerman opened the game with a single each. Catcher J.T. Wise lined out to Ports starter James Simmons, but first baseman Angelo Songco and third baseman Tony Delmonico followed with singles, scoring a total of three runs. With two outs, designated hitter Austin Gallagher doubled and left fielder Wilberto Ortiz singled for two more runs.

The Ports retaliated immediately in the home half. Center fielder Myrio Richard led off with a solo home run to put the Ports on the board. Two singles and a walk would load the bases, and a sacrifice fly by catcher Petey Paramore would bring a second run in. Quakes starter Red Patterson would pitch out of trouble, holding the Ports to just the two runs.

Rancho Cucamonga extended their lead in the third. With two outs, Ortiz homered to left field for the Quakes' sixth run.

In the bottom half, Stockton continued to close in. Second baseman Conner Crumbliss drew a walk and was brought around on a home run out of left field by Paramore. J.J. Leaper would make his Cal League debut in the fourth, after Simmons went three innings, giving up six runs on nine hits. Facing Leaper, the Quakes would jump ahead once again on a three-run home run by Songco.

It looked as though the Ports could make something happen with two outs in the bottom of the fourth. Third baseman Leonardo Gil and Myrio Richard each singled, but with Crumbliss at the plate, Gil was caught in a rundown and tagged out.

Two home runs in the fifth would extend the Quakes lead to 13-4. Buss hit the first two-run shot of the inning. Jessie Mier, who replaced Wise in the third, hit a two-run homer of his own, and that would spell the end for Leaper. Josh Lansford would be the new Ports pitcher and he would retire the side with two strike outs and a fly out.

Crumbliss led off the bottom of the fifth with a double. Designated hitter Michael Choice got his first hit since returning from his injury, a single off the feet of Patterson. Aliotti would get an RBI on a ground out to first base. Paramore singled to move Choice up to third, and Choice scored on a ground out by shortstop Michael Gilmartin.

Lansford worked a one-two-three inning in the sixth with two more strike outs and a ground out. The Ports would face Andy Suiter in the bottom half, after Patterson went five innings, giving up six runs on nine hits.

Connor Hoehn replaced Lansford on the hill in the seventh. Hoehn would give up a lead-off home run to Buss before striking out the side.

The Ports put two runners on in the home. Choice walked and a throwing error by Suiter which allowed Aliotti to reach, but Stockton would come up empty.

Mike Benacka would come in to pitch in the eighth for the Ports. Benacka retired three with a walk mixed in. He would also pitch the ninth, striking out two and giving up a single before drawing the inning-ending ground out.

The Ports would make their last effort facing Logan Bawcom in the ninth. With one out, Choice hit his 28th home run of the season, his first since his injury. It wouldn't be enough in the end, however, Stockton falling by seven runs.

The Ports look to take the rubber match from the Quakes tomorrow at 7:05 p.m. as Rob Gilliam faces off against Andres Santiago.

Clinton Fights Back For Victory

By Matthew Wheaton, Burlington Bees

BURLINGTON, IA- The Burlington Bees (14-29) and Clinton LumberKings (23-20) were tied at 2-2 after four innings before

the LumberKings pushed three runs across home plate in the top of the eighth inning for a 5-2 win before 1,065 fans at Community Field Monday night.

LumberKings 2B Stefen Romero (2-4) hit a solo home run to right field to lead off the second inning to put Clinton up 1-0.

In the third inning Bees CF Tyreace House (1-3) hit an infield single and advanced to second base on a throwing error from Romero. A RBI-single to left field from C Beau Taylor (1-4) plated House and tied the game at 1-1.

Clinton CF Mike McGee (0-2) drew a lead-off walk in the fourth inning and scored on a RBI single to center field from RF Kalian Sams (1-4) to give Clinton a 2-1 lead.

Burlington 1B Josh Whitaker (2-4) led off the fourth inning with a single to center field and later scored on a RBI single from LF Royce Consigli (1-3) to knot the game at 2-2.

McGee earned a walk in the eighth inning and moved to second base on a single to center field from Romero. A RBI single from DH Mickey Wiswall (2-4) plated McGee. Romero scored from third base on a RBI single by 1B Tim Morris (1-4). Sams reached first base on a fielder's choice, scoring Wiswall from third base and the LumberKings took a 5-2 lead.

Bees RHP Josh Bowman allowed two runs on six hits over five innings of work in a no decision. Bees RHP Daniel Tenholder allowed one hit in two innings on the mound.

The Bees and LumberKings wrap up their four-game series on Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. It's "Two-for-Tuesday." Be sure to look for the coupon good for two-for-one general admission tickets in the Hawk Eye newspaper brought to you by 101.7 The Bull. Fans can also bring their package wrapper from KRAFT singles and buy one ticket and get one free. Exclusions do apply. LHP Roenis Elis (1-0, 0.00) gets the start for the LumberKings against RHP Jose Macias (4-3, 5.01) for the Bees. Pre-game coverage begins at 6:10 p.m. on Newsradio 1490 KBUR and online at www.gobees.com.

Lake Monsters Fall 9-3 on Monday

By Paul Stanfield / Vermont Lake Monsters

BURLINGTON, VT --- Tri-City took advantage of four Lake Monster errors and Jamaine Cotton tossed five strong innings in his New York-Penn League debut as the ValleyCats beat Vermont 9-3 on Monday night at historic Centennial Field.

The ValleyCats scored three unearned runs with the help of three Vermont errors in the top of the second inning for a 3-0 lead. The Lake Monsters got a run back in the fourth as Bobby Crocker followed back-to-back singles from Chih-Fang Pan and Chad Oberacker with a sacrifice fly, but Oberacker was then thrown out at the plate on a Chad Lewis line drive single to left.

Tri-City got the lead back to three in the top of the fifth inning on a Matt Duffy RBI single, then added two runs in the eighth on a Neiko Johnson two-run single for a 6-1 lead. Rafael Valenzuela smacked a two-run homer in the top of the ninth and the ValleyCats added another unearned run on a Chad Lewis throwing error.

Lewis would hit a two-run homer in the bottom of the ninth for his second home run of the year and the Lake Monsters first home run at Centennial in the last nine games. Seth Frankoff (3-3) took the loss for Vermont, allowing four runs (one earned) on three hits with three walks and three strikeouts.

Cotton (1-0) allowed one run on five hits with two walks and three strikeouts to pick up the victory for Tri-City (21-30), while Mitchell Lambson tossed three hitless innings of relief with two strikeouts. Andrew Muren went 3-for-4 with two runs scored, while Johnson and Chris Epps both had two hits for the ValleyCats.

Vermont (25-25) has lost four of its last five games to fall to the .500 mark for the first time since they were 1-1 two games into the season. The Lake Monsters now head out on a six-game roadtrip to Auburn and Batavia. The roadtrip opens on Tuesday at Auburn against the Washington Nationals-affiliated Doubledays.