

Oakland A's rally but can't avoid being swept by the Texas Rangers

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's switched up the script Sunday against the Texas Rangers.

Having lost in lopsided fashion the previous two days, they dropped a 7-6 heartbreaker in the series finale after battling all the way back from a 6-0 deficit to tie the game.

All three losses led to the same conclusion, however.

To eventually contend in the American League West, the A's must find a recipe for success against the defending A.L.-champion Rangers, who have the talent and youth to be a division power for several years.

Oakland has dropped eight straight to Texas, its longest dry spell against the Rangers since losing nine in a row from June 19-Sept. 30, 1986.

"It feels like for some reason they've got our number this year," A's closer Andrew Bailey said. "I don't think there's a psychological problem there. It just seems that we've been playing our worst baseball against them."

The A's erased a 6-0 deficit with two runs in the fifth and four in the sixth, when they chased Texas lefty Matt Harrison.

But Bailey (0-3), who had allowed just one earned run in 10 previous outings since the All-Star break, surrendered David Murphy's go-ahead single with two outs in the ninth after pinch runner Craig Gentry stole second.

"I've got to execute my pitch in that situation, and it'd be a different story," Bailey said.

The A's entered the series 31-24 at home and looking to build on the momentum from their recently completed road trip, when they won four of their final five.

Instead, they were swept at home for the first time since dropping three to the Yankees from May 30-June 1.

The A's found themselves in an early hole after right-hander Rich Harden allowed three runs in the first. He hit leadoff man Ian Kinsler after getting ahead 1-2 and issued a bases-loaded walk later in the inning.

Harden walked in another run in the fourth and was pulled after four innings, having run his pitch count to 98.

"The big issue today was just (a lack of) consistency with my command," Harden said.

The Rangers made it 6-0 in the fifth when A's right fielder David DeJesus let a routine fly ball clank off his glove for a two-run error.

Then the tide turned.

Kinsler committed a two-run error of his own in the bottom of the fifth, letting Hideki Matsui's grounder roll under his glove to allow Brandon Allen and Cliff Pennington to score.

The A's tied it with four in the sixth. Kurt Suzuki and Jemile Weeks had RBI singles, Allen doubled home a run, and Matsui evened the score with a run-scoring single to left off Darren Oliver.

"We really were kind of at our worst (early in the game)," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "To pick ourselves up off the ground to tie game, the feeling in our dugout was we were going to win that game, no question."

But in the ninth, Bailey issued a one-out walk to Mitch Moreland. He struck out Yorvit Torrealba, but the speedy Gentry, who pinch ran for Moreland, got a huge jump on Bailey and stole second without a throw.

"The reason he didn't go earlier in the count was because (Bailey) was so quick to the plate," Melvin said. "That was one time he picked his leg up a little and gave (Gentry) an opportunity to go."

Murphy capitalized, singling up the middle to bring home the go-ahead run.

Oakland A's update: Recent call-up Brandon Allen collects three hits in surprise start

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Brandon Allen took advantage of a surprise start at first base Sunday for the A's.

In his second game since being called up from Triple-A Sacramento, Allen went 3 for 4 and doubled home a run in a 7-6 loss to the Texas Rangers.

He was a late addition to the lineup after Conor Jackson was scratched with a sore neck.

Acquired July 31 from Arizona in the Brad Ziegler trade, the left-handed hitting Allen, 25, impressed manager Bob Melvin by getting all three of his hits off Texas lefty Matt Harrison.

"You don't want to have to pinch hit for him," Melvin said. "He showed today that he hangs in there and swings the bat well off left-handers."

Melvin indicated before Sunday's game that Jackson -- hitting .313 since the All-Star break -- remains his regular first baseman.

"He really turned a corner as far as production at the start of the second half," Melvin said, "so it'd be tough to all of a sudden just platoon him. I don't think that would be fair."

But the A's -- 151/2 games out of first place -- must decide when the time is right to start devoting more playing time to prospects.

With Jackson's status unknown, Melvin said Allen likely would get another start Monday against Baltimore.

A trade could potentially free up at-bats for Allen. Designated hitter Hideki Matsui reportedly has cleared waivers, a requirement before any player can be dealt in August.

- Center fielder Coco Crisp returned after missing six games with a strained right calf and went 0 for 5.
- In an effort to improve the team's defense, Melvin said he plans to have players watch video.

Melvin said he wants players to see clips of the good plays they have made in the past -- "positive reinforcement."

Texas scored two runs Sunday when A's right fielder David DeJesus dropped Ian Kinsler's routine fly, the A's A.L.-leading 99th error.

- Melvin said he expects Brandon McCarthy (right knee contusion) to make his next start Wednesday, particularly if McCarthy gets through his side session Monday without incident.
- Monday is the deadline to sign draft picks. The A's highest unsigned pick is right-hander Colin O'Connell, an eighth-round choice from Cal State Fullerton.

Chin Music: Should A's play the vets or the youngsters?

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 8/14/2011 12:31pm

Some breaking news we just received: Conor Jackson was scratched from the A's lineup with neck tightness, so Brandon Allen draws another start at first base. Manager Bob Melvin talked before the game about his first base situation, and the decision between playing Jackson and Allen. Jackson is hitting .313 since the All-Star break, and Melvin thinks that warrants him remaining in the lineup on a somewhat regular basis. So this isn't a platoon situation at this point. But it does bring up an issue the A's will face — how do they balance the playing time between veterans and young players who are brought up in the remaining weeks? You figure Michael Taylor and probably Chris Carter will be up in September, and with the A's entire starting outfield heading for free agency, it stands to reason the younger players should be getting their share of at-bats.

Thoughts? Are you ready for young players like Allen to start getting the majority of starts, or would you stick with veterans who might give the A's a chance to finish with a better record?

–Coco Crisp is back in the lineup after missing six games with a strained right calf. The A's will take any lift they can get as they try to stop a seven-game losing streak to the Texas Rangers. Melvin said beating the Rangers is "a hurdle" the A's need to clear, much like beating the Yankees, learning to win on the road, etc.

–Melvin said he's confident Brandon McCarthy (right knee contusion) will make his next start Wednesday against Baltimore. But the real test comes tomorrow, when McCarthy is scheduled to throw his regular side session. That will be the big indicator of whether he's ready.

–The A's are exploring every avenue for improving their defense, Melvin said. That includes watching video of the good defense they've played in the past — "positive reinforcement," as Melvin puts it. Clearly, the team thinks there's more that goes into improving things than just taking extra grounders before the game. But I'm hearing there will also be a pitcher's fielding practice soon, perhaps Monday. That would seem in order, given how much the pitchers have hurt themselves with errors.

The lineups:

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

Rangers — KInslar 2B, Andrus SS, Hamilton CF, Young 3B, Cruz RF, Napoli C, Moreland 1B, Torrealba DH, Murphy LF; Harrison LHP.

Dave Newhouse: C'mon, Selig, let's tour Oakland

By Dave Newhouse, Oakland Tribune columnist

Dear Bud Selig:

It's been awhile since we've communicated, as my life isn't sports the way it used to be, though I still keep my eye -- and foot -- on sports-related matters if they are community-related.

And so I'm contacting you now with a generous offer. I'm inviting you as my guest to take a personal tour of Oakland, with me as your chauffeur.

It won't be a limo, just a Toyota Camry. But all I'm asking is that you give me a day, or a half-day, to show you around the Oakland you've yet to see.

You've made infrequent appearances here in your 19 years as Major League Baseball commissioner, as uncomfortable as those visits must have been -- for you don't like Oakland very much.

You've publicly stated that putting a franchise here in 1968 was a "terrible mistake." I don't understand your logic as Oakland has won four World Series while the Giants, who came west 10 years earlier, just won their first.

And this is precisely why I'm extending you a personal invitation to be your guide -- so you can see the Oakland that your old Phi Scamma Shamma fraternity pal, Lew Wolff, would prefer that you avoid.

Because the final decision on the A's future is taking longer than the Afghan war, there is time for you to get a true picture of Oakland, and a truer picture of your friend Wolff -- the con man's con man.

And I've nominated myself to show you. We'll start our tour at the Oakland Tribune's ninth-floor offices, just across the freeway from O.co Coliseum, a truly awful name. My "Jim Otto Coliseum" renaming idea makes better sense.

From my desk, you can view the Coliseum complex layout that Wolff refuses to notice. You will notice that there is more acreage to build a ballpark -- and Wolff's baseball village -- than exists with the Giants' quaint ballpark in China Basin.

Wolff was quoted recently as having given up on any Oakland ballpark, just as Oakland has given up on believing one word he says. His predecessor as A's owner, the equally devious Steve Schott, tried to move the A's out of Oakland from the very day he bought the club with Ken Hofmann in 1995.

But if you look honestly at the A's pitiful attendance, why would anyone pay money to support some carpetbaggers who keep looking elsewhere? That's why Oakland so misses the Haas family, the only ownership group that treated it decently, and thus drew 2.9 million fans one year (1990).

Wolff first coveted Fremont, but his baseball village didn't get to first base there. Now he's fixated on San Jose, a city that's broke, says its mayor, and a city the Giants claim territorially, while defying Wolff and fellow owner, the muted John Fisher, to do something about it. They probably could in court, but that might take years.

Regardless, San Jose won't ever have what Oakland has -- BART, the freeway, Amtrak, a central location, several bridges and baseball history all wrapped together -- in the way of ballpark plus points.

Now, Buddy boy, let me show you Oakland's friendly neighborhoods, its waterfront, its lakes, all its new restaurants and its lovely hill trails. I'll be careful not to run over a deer, a raccoon or a skunk while you enjoy the view. On a crystal-clear day, you will see all five bridges.

There's no denying that Oakland has abundant crime, but what big city doesn't? Even your beloved Milwaukee isn't Vatican City. Your Brewers have no World Series titles either.

C'mon, Commish, let me show you a good time -- and the real Oakland, not the fictitious Oakland that Schott and now Wolff have tried to sell you.

And while you're here, find us another ownership group like the Haases.

A's rally but fall short against Rangers, 7-6

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Were it not for Conor Jackson's stiff neck Sunday afternoon, Brandon Allen would have sat on Oakland's bench against Texas.

Instead, Allen, called up the day before, was a late addition to the lineup, and he had a big day, with three hits. And the A's almost - almost - pulled off a late comeback win against a team that has dominated them this year. Instead, Texas came away with a 7-6 victory, but only after Oakland had scored twice in the fifth and four times in the sixth to tie it.

"It shows the fight in everyone," Allen said. "As a team, we came together collectively and gave 'em a run."

In the ninth, however, Texas cobbled together a run against A's closer Andrew Bailey, who had allowed only one since the All-Star break. Mitch Moreland walked with one out, and on a 1-2 pitch, pinch-runner Craig Gentry stole second.

Up until that point, Bailey had been keeping Gentry close, his times to the plate too fast for Gentry to get a good jump. The one time Bailey lifted his leg a little high, manager Bob Melvin said, Gentry went.

"When you've got two strikes, in that situation, you don't worry about the runner," Bailey said. "I've got to execute my pitch. If I do, it would be a different story."

With the count 2-2 and Gentry at second, David Murphy sent Gentry home by rolling a single up the middle.

The A's went down 1-2-3 against Rangers closer Neftali Feliz, and Texas now has won eight in a row over Oakland. The last time the A's lost as many as eight straight to the Rangers was during a nine-game skid in 1986. Oakland is a season-high 15 1/2 games behind Texas.

"For some reason, they've got our number this year," Bailey said. "It seems like we're playing our worst baseball against them."

The A's looked like they were going to go down quickly and quietly after three of the first four Rangers batters reached base and scored. Starter Rich Harden allowed four runs in his four innings, leaving the bullpen with a lot of work to do, and Texas scored two more in the fifth thanks to David DeJesus' error; both runs off reliever Bruce Billings were unearned.

In the bottom of that inning, though, the A's got two back on a Rangers error, and in the sixth, they really let loose. Scott Sizemore led off with a double, and with one out, Kurt Suzuki singled him in. Allen doubled home Suzuki, and Cliff Pennington walked. Starter Matt Harrison exited in favor of left-hander Darren Oliver, and Jemile Weeks delivered an RBI single to left.

With two outs, Hideki Matsui came up, and Oliver sent him sprawling with a pitch up and in to make the count 3-2. After one foul ball, Matsui knocked a base hit the other way to send in Pennington and tie the game.

The previous two days against Texas, the A's had been held to five hits per game, and Melvin had called the Rangers "another hurdle we have to get over."

After the A's at least mounted a strong challenge Sunday, Melvin said, "Considering where we were, down 6-0 and not playing well again, really at our worst, to pick ourselves up and tie the game, the feeling was that we were going to win the game. In the dugout, there was no doubt. The mojo just kind of turned."

"You take from it what you can," said Billings, who made his Oakland debut. "But this was a game we should have taken. Hopefully, the next time we can come out with a win."

Oakland A's still struggling on defense

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Defense remains a pressing issue for the A's, and Sunday, **David DeJesus'** error in right - he dropped a flyball by **Ian Kinsler** in the fifth inning - led to two unearned runs.

That was the A's 99th error, most in the league. The second-worst fielding team is Texas, and in the bottom of the fifth, the A's scored two runs off on an error, as **Hideki Matsui's** grounder went through Kinsler's legs and into right.

Manager **Bob Melvin** likened the defensive issues to the team's first-half hitting woes.

"These guys put in a lot of hard work trying to get the offense back on track, and they did," he said. "We're going to do that much more on defense."

Melvin said that the team will watch videos of strong past defensive efforts as positive reinforcement. As for on-field defensive work, he said the team already does plenty.

DeJesus has four errors in his past 34 games after going errorless in the previous 301 games. The A's have made nine errors in the past five games.

Jackson scratched: **Conor Jackson** woke up with a stiff neck, Melvin said, so he was a late scratch. Melvin said that **Brandon Allen**, who had three hits Sunday, is likely to be at first base again today because of Jackson's problem.

Asked about Allen's potential playing time before the game, Melvin said the plan is to "run the best guys out there." Melvin did mention the outfield as a possibility for Allen, too.

Briefly: Coco Crisp was back in center field after missing a week with a right calf strain. He went 0-for-5. ... The A's are still in discussions with a few of their unsigned draft picks. Today is the signing deadline.

A'S LEADING OFF

Optimistic: Brandon McCarthy, struck below the right knee by a liner by Texas' Endy Chavez on Friday, will throw a bullpen session today, and manager Bob Melvin is optimistic that McCarthy will be able to start Wednesday.

Drumbeat: Conor Jackson a scratch with neck tightness; Crisp back in A's lineup

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum, 8/14/2011 12:07pm

Conor Jackson was just scratched with neck tightness, so here's the new lineup behind Rich Harden, with Brandon Allen getting another start at first in place of Jackson: Weeks 2b, Crisp cf, Matsui DH, Willingham lf, Sizemore 3b, DeJesus rf, Suzuki c, Allen 1b, Pennington ss.

Crisp is in the lineup for the first time in a week after sitting out with a right calf strain. I asked manager Bob Melvin if he has any limitations and he said that Crisp doesn't - but he also is a player who knows how to play with bumps and bruises and other nagging things. He's smart enough not to do anything too crazy.

Melvin indicated again that Allen might not get a lot of starts, though he left it open-ended. It's a difficult juggling act, trying to get a look at young players but also trying to win games. Melvin said he wants to put his best options on the field every day, which means more often than not it will be Oakland's established players. As I wrote last week, it's a fine line for the front office to walk, too: This team has a lot of pending free agents, including the entire starting outfield, DH and Jackson, so getting a look at next year's potential options seems as if it might be a good idea at some point, but GM Billy Beane said the A's remain focused on trying to win as many games as possible. He said that it's tough to put player development ahead of big-league results.

One other potential consideration: The A's are very likely to have run all of their pending free agents through waivers, and if they have a chance to move any of them, they need to keep them playing in front of scouts. There are numerous scouts here today, in fact, and one scout from a team well out of contention was even asking about some potential waiver-deal type players. So you never know.

I'd think that September will be the month we'll finally see Allen playing regularly, and I hope that Michael Taylor and Chris Carter are also guys who get some at-bats that month. Melvin did mention Allen as an option in the outfield, too.

Melvin called the Rangers "a hurdle" that the A's need to overcome. They've lost seven in a row to Texas. Another hurdle Melvin discussed today - defense. Oakland really isn't cutting it in the field this season, and Melvin said that he includes himself when he talks about the problem. He's the guy who needs to figure out how to fix it, and he said one current method that the team is trying is watching video. Positive-reinforcement type stuff, highlights of great plays each player has made, that kind of thing.

Yesterday the team made four errors, but Scott Sizemore is still learning third, Eric Sogard is more of a second baseman, and Sogard and Jemile Weeks have limited big-league team. To me, the strangest defensive lapses were early in the season, when Kevin Kouzmanoff, a good third baseman, and Daric Barton, a very good first baseman, were making lots of errors. Also, the high total by the pitching staff is pretty unacceptable - 17, the most by the A's staff since 2001.

Melvin said this morning that Brandon McCarthy might be able to make his next scheduled start, Wednesday against Baltimore. The team will know more tomorrow when McCarthy throws his bullpen session.

It's a gorgeous day here and it doesn't look as if it will be packed. Anyone considering taking in a ballgame today should do so, this is ideal. Great weather, looks like reasonably short concession lines, plenty of parking....

A's show heart before Rangers escape

By Rick Eymer / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Andrew Bailey was just as frustrated walking Mitch Moreland as he was with giving up the go-ahead hit to David Murphy. The stolen base was just another distraction.

Brandon Allen had three hits, including his first RBI in an Oakland uniform, as the Athletics recovered from a six-run deficit only to see it slip away again. The Texas Rangers completed a three-game sweep of the A's with a 7-6 victory on Sunday.

"I can't put a guy on in that situation," said the A's closer, who made his first appearance in five days. "This was a tough one to lose because the team battled back and picked us up."

The Rangers sent Craig Gentry -- whose steal of second base proved vital -- to run for Moreland in the top of the ninth. Bailey understood what was at stake.

"One of his jobs is to come in and steal a base every now and then," Bailey said. "I wanted to keep him close, but once I got two strikes on Murphy, I wanted to get the hitter and not worry about the runner so much. If I execute that pitch, it's a different story."

Gentry scored standing up on Murphy's ground-ball single up the middle, handing the A's yet another disappointing loss. The Rangers have beaten Oakland eight straight and swept them at home for the first time since May 2005.

"They just seem to have our number," Bailey said. "It just seems like we play our worst ball against them."

It was a miserable series for the Oakland defense, which committed seven errors over the three games. The A's have made 99 errors on the season, most in the Major Leagues. It well could have been 100, but the official scorekeeper graciously changed an error he called on Cliff Pennington to a hit a few seconds later.

A's manager Bob Melvin hopes the late rally will spill over into the three-game series with the visiting Baltimore Orioles, which begins Monday night.

"There we were, down 6-0 and not playing very well again," Melvin said. "We were really, kind of, at our worst. Then to pick ourselves up again and dig ourselves out of that hole was encouraging. I felt the mojo starting to change."

Instead, the Rangers separated themselves a little more from the Los Angeles Angels, who they play a four-game series in Anaheim beginning Monday night.

"We were in a situation that's tough to do and that's try to sweep a team," Texas manager Ron Washington said. "They were in a situation that's desperate, and they were fighting hard. You get up 6-0, you think they would lay down, but they didn't. Bob Melvin is not going to let that happen."

The Rangers got to A's starter Rich Harden for three runs in the first inning and added another run against him in the fourth.

Texas added two unearned runs against Bruce Billings, who made his Oakland debut in the fifth.

"The issue today was not consistently throwing my fastball for strikes," Harden said. "I wasn't getting hit hard or making a lot of mistakes."

Harden, who walked in two runs, gave up four runs on five hits. He hit a batter, walked five and struck out four. Harden has allowed nine runs on 13 hits in his nine innings (two starts) against the Rangers this season.

A's pitchers have walked home a run an American League-leading 14 times, which matches the San Diego Padres for most in the Majors.

Rangers second baseman Ian Kinsler bolstered the A's chances when he misplayed a grounder that cost two runs in the fifth.

Sizemore's double leading off the sixth sparked the game-tying rally. Kurt Suzuki singled to drive in Sizemore, and Allen followed with an RBI double. Jemile Weeks and Hideki Matsui each singled home a run to draw the A's even.

Allen was in the lineup because Conor Jackson was scratched with a tight neck.

"I take batting practice like I might pinch-hit," Allen said. "I just always have to be ready. If I get a chance, I want to be able to help the team."

Melvin said Allen would be back in the lineup again Monday night.

Rangers' starter Matt Harrison went 5 1/3 innings, giving up six runs (four earned) on six hits. He walked three and struck out six.

Gio hopes start's not abbreviated as A's duel O's

By Mark Thompson / MLB.com | 8/14/2011

In mid-July, A's starting pitcher Gio Gonzalez was 9-6 with a promising 2.33 ERA, but he hasn't sniffed a victory in nearly a month since.

Gonzalez has lost each of his last four starts, giving up a combined 20 runs in 21 1/3 innings.

His ERA rose almost a full point in the last month, as it now sits at 3.25.

"I feel like I'm pitching a lot better than my performance is coming out," he said. "I feel like everything is looking alive. It's just that the end results aren't there. I can't explain it, just gotta continue to battle through it."

And that's exactly what Oakland manager Bob Melvin expects his starter to do -- battle through it.

"Good pitchers go through difficult times," he said. "This isn't the best time of the season for him. He's going to have to work his way through it, and he will."

Another pitcher working through some new struggles is Baltimore right-hander Tommy Hunter.

Hunter is coming off his second start of the season after he joined the rotation on Aug. 5. Hunter is 0-1 as a starter with an ERA of 6.94.

In his last start, Hunter earned a no-decision after he threw 6 2/3 innings and gave up four runs on seven hits. The Orioles won the game, 6-4, with a walk-off home run in the 10th inning.

"Tommy did an outstanding job today of setting the tone and really being aggressive out there," Orioles closer Kevin Gregg said. "I think it led to a solid game for the pitching staff all around."

The biggest issue facing the Orioles is just a lack of those solid wins.

They are undoubtedly in the midst of another losing season with no playoffs in sight; the O's own the second-worst record in the Majors.

"[The losses] are mounting," right fielder Nick Markakis said. "We just have to do everything we can. We just have to go out there and play the game and the end result at the end of the night, it is what it is. If you go out there and give 100 percent at the end of the night, whether you win or lose, you expect that out of your players. I think we're doing that. We're just coming up short."

Orioles: The streak stays alive

Thanks to a three-hit performance on Sunday, Markakis has now recorded a hit in 178 consecutive series.

He's riding the longest active streak in the Majors, which started in a three-game series played from May 23-25, 2008.

According to Elias, White Sox center fielder Juan Pierre hit in 241 consecutive series from 2003-07. Markakis would need to continue his streak through September 2012 to catch Pierre.

- J.J. Hardy has hit five home runs in his last eight games.
- Third baseman Mark Reynolds is on pace to hit 36 home runs this season, which would be a club record for a third baseman. He currently has 26 homers.

Athletics: A's and their errors

The A's have committed a Major League-leading 99 errors this season, and made nine errors in their last five games.

In the past seven seasons, Oakland has committed more than 100 errors in a season once.

- The A's are 30-49 (.380) in weekday games.
- Oakland has gone homerless in their last four games after hitting homers in a season-high eight consecutive games.

Worth noting

- Monday's game will start the final meeting between the A's and the Orioles this season.
- The Orioles and Athletics have played two three-game series this season with the home team sweeping each time. The upcoming series is in Oakland.

Crisp returns to A's lineup

By Rick Eymer / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Coco Crisp returned to the Athletics' lineup Sunday after missing six games with a strained right calf. A's manager Bob Melvin was ecstatic about it.

"We're all obviously excited to have him back," Melvin said.

The A's could have used his production of late. Crisp is hitting .364 (24-for-66) over his last 17 games and has been a catalyst, along with Jemile Weeks, at the top of the lineup. He leads the American League with a career-high 37 steals.

Crisp is also a career .545 hitter against Matt Harrison, who started for the Rangers on Sunday.

With Crisp on the shelf, Melvin was working with a thin bench. That was one of the reasons the club called up Brandon Allen, who has the ability to play in the outfield as well as first base.

Allen, whom the A's acquired in a trade with the Arizona Diamondbacks last month, will work with A's coach Tye Waller on outfield play for the next few days.

The addition of Allen prompted the question of playing time to evaluate younger players. Melvin said it was too early to consider.

"We have a four-man bench, so there aren't that many decisions to make," Melvin said. "This isn't September, so we're not at that point. Right now, we're going to put out the best lineup."

Pennington OK following Bell's palsy flare-up

OAKLAND -- A's shortstop Cliff Pennington was walking around the clubhouse with his right hand covered in a bandage that looked like a cast on Sunday, raising concerns of his availability.

Not to worry, said Pennington, it was just ice -- a precautionary measure. He was in the lineup on Sunday.

Pennington was out of Saturday's lineup because of his recent bout with Bell's palsy, a disorder of the nerves that control movement of the muscles in the face.

"It's a lot better," Pennington said of the Bell's palsy, which usually disappears on its own after a few weeks or so. "I mean, it's still there. It's no big deal."

Pennington missed a handful of games as a result of the disorder, and the A's feel a need for caution.

Pennington, who hit .167 on the recently concluded road trip, is batting .342 since the All-Star break.

CoJack scratched with stiff neck

OAKLAND -- A's first baseman Conor Jackson was scratched from the starting lineup about an hour before the game because of neck tightness.

Jackson had earned the everyday job there shortly after Bob Melvin took over as manager when Bob Geren was let go.

"He has really turned the corner," Melvin said of Jackson.

Jackson has been one of Oakland's most versatile players this season. He's started 77 games at four different positions, including his first appearances in right field and at third base.

Jackson is hitting .313 with a pair of home runs in the 25 games since the All-Star break.

Brandon Allen, whom the A's recalled from Triple-A Sacramento on Saturday, replaced Jackson in the lineup.

A's swept by Rangers

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — David Murphy hit a tiebreaking RBI single with two outs in the ninth inning, and the Texas Rangers beat the Oakland Athletics 7-6 on Sunday for a three-game series sweep.

Mitch Moreland hit a sacrifice fly, Michael Young and Mike Napoli each drew bases-loaded walks against former Ranger Rich Harden and first-place Texas extended its winning streak in the rivalry to eight games. The Rangers (69-52) also moved a season-best 17 games over .500.

Mike Adams (1-1) pitched a 1-2-3 eighth for the victory, then Neftali Feliz finished for his 23rd save in 29 chances as Texas won its fourth straight road game heading into a key four-game series with the Angels in Anaheim.

Andrew Bailey (0-3) issued a one-out walk to Moreland in the ninth. Craig Gentry came in to run for Moreland and stole second to put himself in good position on Murphy's single to center.

This marks the A's longest skid against the Rangers since dropping nine in a row from June 19-Sept. 30, 1986. Texas outscored Oakland 23-8 in the series.

Hideki Matsui hit a tying RBI single in the sixth after he was brushed back twice by reliever Darren Oliver, once even going to the ground to get out of the way.

A day after the A's committed four errors, they had another blunder. Right fielder David DeJesus dropped a routine fly ball by Ian Kinsler in the fifth, allowing two runs to score.

In the bottom half, Kinsler misplayed a bouncing grounder to second that went under his glove and brought home Oakland's first two runs.

This game had a little bit of everything: an Oakland comeback, a hit batter, the two defensive mistakes and a balk. Texas starter Matt Harrison even turned his attention for a brief moment to the folkloric dancers who performed on "Fiesta Day" right behind home plate as he warmed up in the middle of the sixth.

Harrison was done that inning. He allowed Scott Sizemore's leadoff double, an RBI single to Kurt Suzuki one out later and then Brandon Allen's RBI double. No. 9 hitter Cliff Pennington walked and Rangers manager Ron Washington turned to Oliver.

Late lineup addition and newcomer Allen provided the highlights for Oakland.

Allen singled leading off the third for his first hit since joining the A's, then produced another base hit to start the fifth. He also doubled in the sixth.

Allen, acquired in last month's trade with Arizona that sent reliever Brad Ziegler to the Diamondbacks, was called up from Triple-A Sacramento on Saturday.

Harrison received a mound visit from pitching coach Mike Maddux after loading the bases with one out in the third. He calmly got out of it unscathed, retiring Matsui on a flyout and cleanup hitter Josh Willingham on a swinging strikeout.

Harden fell behind right away against his former team. He hit leadoff man Kinsler with a pitch, then got Elvis Andrus on a flyout before four straight Rangers reached base. Texas' first run scored on a wild pitch, then Napoli drew a bases-loaded walk and Moreland added his sacrifice fly.

Harden walked in another run in the fourth when Young drew a free pass. Harden wound up with a season-high five walks over four innings. The right-hander hadn't issued five walks since last Aug. 23 while with Texas.

The reigning AL champion Rangers released Harden after the 2010 regular season, in which he struggled with injuries and control. Harden received a \$1.5 million, one-year contract in December to rejoin Oakland, his original team.

NOTES: Rangers DH Yorvit Torrealba extended his hitting streak to 12 games with a leadoff single in the fourth. Young's hitting streak ended at 12 games. ... Oakland scratched 1B Conor Jackson from the lineup because of neck tightness. Allen took his place. ... A's CF Coco Crisp returned to the lineup after missing six games with a strained right calf. ... Texas has won 17 of 21 vs. the AL West since May 15. ... LHP Gio Gonzalez (9-10) pitches Monday's series opener for the A's against Baltimore trying to end a four-start losing streak. Gonzalez is 0-5 with a 5.82 ERA in six starts against AL East clubs this year. ... RHP Alexi Ogando (11-5) takes the ball in Texas' opener with the Angels. Ogando, 2-0 with a 0.41 ERA lifetime vs. Los Angeles, looks to take over the team lead in victories.

Ay carmuba! A's Disappoint all cultures

Kibby Kleiman, East Bay Express

Today was Fiesta Day at the O.co Coliseum, and the Athletics celebrated by giving the Texas Rangers a going away party. The visitors completed their sweep, giving A's fans a taste of pennant baseball for the last six weeks of the season. It won't be much fun for us, the pinata in this play, as teams with something to play for are going to beat us like a tambourine. But this weekend's beatings were made somehow worse by sad promotions, like Friday's Italian Heritage Day that featured a warmed-over Rat Pack trio, who drew well-earned boos every time they appeared, taking some of the heat off the A's terrible defense.

Why we would want to see faux Frankie, Dino and Sammie is one question, the next would be why they thought singing about New York would be well received. The A's game but overmatched in-game host, Kara Tsuboi tried to install some spirit, but didn't really have a clever comeback for the boos that rained down on the Flat Pack. Their swingin' rendition of Take Me Out to the Ballgame wasn't a lot better received. The A's should either drop such half-hearted entertainments or go all the way a la, having the guy do *all* the Public Address announcing in Italian. Or making the dot racing dots the same colors of the Italian flag

Saturday the only ethnicity being feted were the Ray Fosse true believers, who got a bobble-head,. Today celebrated Latinos—sort of.

The A's can't be blamed for trying, but they can be blamed for the tentative nature of almost everything this season. We're not fish but foul, and there is one week left of a home stand that will wrap up August in Oakland, and if you're looking for a souvenir, next weekend features "mini-cars" on Saturday and Kids exercise mats on Sunday. Story of the season, Oakland.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Miller hits 29th homer, but River Cats fall

By Veronika Tafoya / Sacramento River Cats

Jai Miller inched closer to Sacramento's single-season home run record, but the River Cats fell short in snapping their eight-game losing streak, falling 9-3 to Round Rock on Sunday afternoon.

Miller's 29th homer, which puts him five away from Graham Koonce's single-season franchise record of 34, tied the game at 1-1 in the first inning.

River Cats left-hander Carlos Hernandez made his first career start against Round Rock, and it started off a little rocky. He hit Leonys Martin on his first pitch, then allowed him to score on a base hit from Nick Green for the first run of the game.

The Express took back the lead in the third inning. Esteban German walked and stole second base. Then on a full-count pitch, Chad Tracy knocked out a two-run homer to give Round Rock a 3-2 lead.

Round Rock moved further ahead in the fourth inning. Brad Nelson singled and Hernandez gave up back-to-back walks to load the bases and start a rally that would ultimately result in four runs scored, three with one out.

Hernandez ended his outing with seven runs earned off of seven hits, striking out five and walking three over 3.2 innings.

Andrew Carignan picked up the final out for Sacramento in the fourth, and was hitless through 2.1 innings and struck out four batters.

Sacramento scored in the fifth inning, with Jermaine Mitchell's RBI single that brought in Josh Donaldson and cut the deficit to 7-3.

Mitchell went 2-for-4 with a walk in Sunday's game, snapping a streak of 16 hitless at-bats, and said the hits were definitely a relief.

"They felt good," Mitchell said. "I always try to take a good swing but today I was lucky enough to get good pitches to swing at. I was just able to make some things happen today."

Despite breaking the hitless streak, the River Cats as a team were not able to break their own winless record, and increased their streak to the eighth consecutive loss. They are just one game away from tying the season record for longest losing slump, which took place from June 26 to July 17.

The River Cats would not score again after the fifth. Alternatively, Round Rock picked up two more in the seventh, scored off three hits from Sacramento reliever Justin Souza.

Sacramento will have one more chance to avoid the sweep from Round Rock during the final game of the series and the last time River Cats will see Round Rock this season. Right handers Tyson Ross and Ryan Tucker face off at Raley Field on Monday at 7:05 p.m.

Hollingsworth struggles as RockHounds fall to Naturals

By Jordan Mason , Midland Reporter-Telegram

For the second game in a row, the Northwest Arkansas Naturals gave the Midland RockHounds starter a rude welcome Sunday, jumping out to a big early lead en route to a 7-4 win Sunday at Citibank Ballpark.

Jamie Romak started what was a long night for Ethan Hollingsworth with a solo home run in the second as the Naturals went up six runs by the bottom of the sixth.

Midland closed the gap to 7-4 with two runs in the eighth but ultimately wasn't able to pull out the win.

"Our team's been doing a good job lately of getting the clutch hits," Naturals right fielder Will Myers said. "It really paid off for us in the long run."

The loss wiped out a golden opportunity to gain on first-place San Antonio as the Missions dropped their third consecutive game Sunday in a 2-1 loss to Arkansas.

Midland, who must win the Texas League South second-half standings to reach the playoffs, remains three games back of San Antonio.

The RockHounds must have had a feeling of déjà vu early Sunday after going down 6-1 to the Naturals heading to the bottom of the fourth Saturday.

Romak started by launching Hollingsworth's 0-1 pitch to deep left for a solo shot to open the scoring in the second.

Midland answered in the bottom of the third when Grant Green followed a Matt Sulentic double with a double of his own to score Sulentic and tie the game at one.

But Northwest Arkansas was just getting started.

The Naturals bats got going again in the fourth when they opened the inning with two singles off Hollingsworth.

Two batters later, Anthony Seratelli belted a sinking line drive to right for an RBI single to put the Naturals back in the lead.

Then Myers, who finished 2-for-4 with two runs, smoked the first pitch he saw to left for an RBI single of his own.

Rey Navarro opened the floodgates two batters later when he ripped a 1-0 pitch down the right field line that scored two runs and put the Naturals up 5-1.

Navarro added to the Northwest Arkansas advantage on a well-hit sacrifice fly with the bases loaded in the sixth before an Adam Heether error allowed a second run to score later in the inning, putting the Naturals up 7-1 heading into the bottom of the sixth.

"It feels good to get out there early," Myers said. "Your pitcher, it makes him a lot more comfortable out there."

Hollingsworth finished the night having allowed seven runs, six earned, on 10 hits in 5 1/3 innings.

Naturals starter Will Smith, meanwhile, flustered the RockHounds hitters for seven innings, only giving up two runs while striking out six.

"The middle of the game their starter was able to get the groundouts and the leakouts, and we weren't able to get anything going there," RockHounds manager Steve Scarsone said.

Down 7-2 entering the eighth, Midland made it interesting when Stephen Parker smacked an RBI single to left to cut the lead to four with two on and no outs.

Yet the Naturals ended the rally before it started when Kevin Chapman got Michael Spina to ground into a 6-4-3 double play on the next at-bat.

Adam Heether slapped an RBI single to center to make it 7-4, but the RockHounds were unable to get it any closer than that.

Scarsone tipped his hat to the hot-hitting Naturals after the game but refused to worry over the missed opportunity to gain ground in the playoff hunt.

"Just look at it as just another game," Scarsone said. "We've got to go back out there tomorrow and look to try to jump ahead, try to keep them at bay early on in the game so we can get an opportunity to score some runs."

HOUND BITES: RockHounds designated hitter Matt Sulentic had the only two hits, both doubles, in three innings against Naturals starter Will Smith before Grant Green smacked an RBI double to right in the bottom of the third. The hit extended Green's hit streak to 13 games. ... Jeff Bianchi had the defensive play of the game when Adam Heether blooped what looked like an RBI single to shallow right. Bianchi, though, simply took a step back then leaped into the air to snag the ball out of the air and save the run. ... The RockHounds remain three games behind first-place San Antonio in the Texas League South but are now just one game ahead of third-place Frisco after the RoughRiders beat Tulsa 10-3 Sunday. Midland needs to win the South to reach the playoffs.

TODAY'S PROBABLES: Gary Daley (5-4, 4.43) is expected to get the nod for the RockHounds while Jeremy Jeffress (1-1, 4.12) is expected to start for Northwest Arkansas.

Stockton Swings Its Way To 13-3 Win

Stockton Ports

ADELANTO, Calif. - The Stockton Ports enjoyed their last game of the season at arguably the California League's most hitter-friendly ballpark on Sunday night. The Boys of Banner Island pounded out 16 hits en route to a 13-3 blowout win over the High Desert Mavericks, earning a split of the four-game series in Adelanto to start their South Division road trip.

Each team traded jabs in the 1st inning. On the second pitch of the ballgame, Conner Crumbliss hit his second home run in as many games—a solo shot to right to give the Ports a quick 1-0 lead. High Desert countered in the bottom of the inning with a two-out RBI single from Jake Schlander to make it a 1-1 game.

Mavericks starter Jandy Sena (2-4) ran into huge trouble in the top of the 3rd. After retiring the first two hitters on groundouts, Sena gave up a triple to Michael Gilmartin. That hit began a stretch of nine straight hitters in a row reaching base safely. Anthony Aliotti walked and Petey Paramore broke the 1-1 tie with a single to right. Dusty Coleman followed with a single to left to score Aliotti and make it a 3-1 game. After Rashun Dixon walked to load the bases, Mitch LeVier delivered a bases-clearing triple to the right field corner to make it 6-1. Ryan Lipkin followed with an RBI single and Crumbliss walked, signaling the end of the line for Sena. Jon Hesketh took over and allowed a two-run triple to Myrio Richard that made it a 9-1 Stockton advantage.

Sena would take the loss, going 2.2 innings and allowing nine runs on eight hits while walking four and striking out two.

High Desert got a run back in the bottom of the inning off Ports starter James Simmons (2-2) on an RBI single from Steven Proscia to make it 9-2. The Mavs plated another run in the 4th, taking advantage of a pair of Stockton errors to make it a 9-3 game, but it was as close as they'd get on the night.

Simmons earned his second Cal-League victory, going five innings and allowing three runs (two earned) on six hits while striking out four.

Stockton's offense had one final surge in the 5th. With Hesketh still on the hill and with two on and nobody out, Crumbliss delivered a two-run double to left to make it 11-3. Richard followed with a two-run homer off the scoreboard in left-center to give the Ports their largest lead of the night at 13-3.

Hesketh allowed four runs on six hits in 1.1 innings of work.

Jason Markovitz and Jason Buursma combined to pitch five scoreless innings down the stretch for High Desert.

Jake Brown (SV, 1) came on in relief of Simmons to start the 6th and tossed four scoreless innings, allowing three hits while recording a strikeout. Brown earned a four-inning save, his first save of the year.

For Stockton, Richard went 3-for-6 with 4 RBI and fell a triple shy of hitting for the cycle. Crumbliss went 2-for-4 with 3 RBI and three runs scored. Every Ports player scored at least one run and six of the nine in the starting lineup drove in at least one run.

The Ports will begin the second leg of their Southern California road trip on Monday as they kick off a three-game series with the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes at The Epicenter. Rob Gilliam (12-5, 5.04 ERA) gets the nod for the Ports in the series opener, opposed by Quakes right-hander Andres Santiago (6-4, 4.32 ERA). First pitch is set for 7:05 p.m. PDT.

Bees Record 10th Shutout of the Season

By Jon Versteeg, Burlington Bees

BELOIT, WI- RHP Jose Macias (5-3) pitched seven innings, struck out five men and along with RHP T.J. Walz (1.1 Innings) and RHP Pedro Vidal (0.2 Innings), combined for an eight-hit shutout of the Beloit Snappers with a 3-0 Burlington win before 1,489 fans at Pohlman Field on Sunday afternoon.

The Bees scored three runs in the fifth inning. RF Jose Crisotomo (1-4) doubled and scored on a single by 1B Josh Whitaker (1-2). He advanced to second base on the throw in from the outfield.

That was the only earned run in the game. LF Jose Rivero (0-4) hit a ground ball to third base. Andrew Leer unleashed a throw that went high up into the air and pulled 1B Lance Ray off the bag. With runners at first and third base, the Bees attempted a double steal. C Tobias Streich threw to second base and Whitaker scored from third base. 2B Adam Bryant threw wide of home plate and Rivero scored all the way from second base for a 3-0 lead.

The Bees and Snappers finish their series on Monday night at 7:00 p.m. RHP Blake Hassebrock (6-7, 2.60) gets the start for Burlington against RHP Blayne Weller (4-4, 4.45) for Beloit. Pre-game coverage begins at 6:40 p.m. on Newsradio 1490 KBUR and online at gobees.com.

Lake Monsters Rained Out On Sunday

By Paul Stanfield / Vermont Lake Monsters

BATAVIA, NY --- Sunday afternoon's New York-Penn League game between the Vermont Lake Monsters and Batavia Muckdogs was cancelled due to rain at Dwyer Stadium. The game was the final meeting between the two teams this season and will not be made up, meaning that Vermont is now scheduled to play a 75-game season instead of 76.

It is the third time this season that the Lake Monsters have had the final game of a road series postponed due to rain, but the first time it occurred in the final meeting between the two teams. Earlier this season Vermont had series finales postponed at Brooklyn and Tri-City, but made up both rain outs as part of doubleheaders at historic Centennial Field.

The Lake Monsters head into the New York-Penn League All-Star break as the Stedler Division leader with a 28-27 record. Vermont, which has won three straight after a four-game losing streak, entered play on Sunday with a two-game lead in the Stedler over the Connecticut Tigers (25-28) who are scheduled to play at State College Sunday evening.

After five Lake Monster players (Sean Jamieson, Chih-Fang Pan, Tanner Peters, Nick Rickles and Jeff Urlaub) take part in the New York-Penn League All-Star Game at Lowell on Tuesday, Vermont returns home to Centennial Field to begin a six-game homestand on Wednesday at 7:05 pm against the Mahoning Valley Scrappers. The Lake Monsters will play a pair of three-game series against the Scrappers and the Hudson Valley Renegades Wednesday through Monday, August 22nd.