

TORONTO SUN
Friday, August 19, 2011

ROMERO JUST KEEPS ON ROLLIN'

Ken Fidlin

OAKLAND - Ricky Romero has been on hot streaks but he's never been on this kind of roll before.

Thursday night at O.co Coliseum, he handcuffed the Oakland A's with a three-hit, complete-game 7-0 shutout. The Tour de Force has become business as usual for the Toronto Blue Jays ace.

In his last five starts Romero is 5-0. He's thrown 40 1/3 innings, allowed 14 hits, four runs and held opponents to a batting average of .110. He has an ERA of 0.89.

Overall, Romero is now 12-9 on the season with a 2.73 ERA.

He's done just about everything for the club but drive the team bus, and you can bet he'd have that covered if need be. It's how his mom used to make a living.

But seriously, the only thing Romero will be driving is hitters to distraction.

"He's a competitive guy who can be emotional at times but I think this year he has learned to channel that in the right way and not let it become a distraction," said Jays manager John Farrell.

"With the exception of a three or four game stretch, he's pitched as well as anyone in the upper echelon of the American League."

That stretch of games was just before the all-star break. Since then he's been lights out.

"He's been very efficient, throws a lot of strikes and he has the ability to get that key strikeout when he needs it."

In two of the first three innings, the A's put runners in scoring position with less than two outs and Romero wriggled out of both jams.

"Everything feels right," said Romero. "I'm attacking the zone, I'm being consistent with my pitches. I'm not panicking in those situations like I had in the first three innings, first and second, first and third, bases-loaded.

"I'm trying to slow the game down when I'm out there. My game doesn't change. I'm still aggressive. But you do take a little step back and not try to do too much."

In previous years, Romero's performances have tended to tail off later in the season. Not so in 2011.

"I feel great. My arm has been bouncing back real good. It's a credit to the trainers," he said. "I'm also taking good care of myself. Every year you kind of learn a little bit more about your body. I'm doing the small things to make sure my arm stays fresh.

"As years go by and you mature as a pitcher, you start to understand that less is more, just focus on the pitch you're making at that moment."

Meanwhile, Jays outfielder Colby Rasmus had three hits, including a two-run home run to spark an 11-hit attack by the club. Catcher J.P. Arencibia also drove in a pair with a sixth-inning single. Third baseman Brett Lawrie drove in a run and had two more hits to raise his average to .378 since being called up two weeks ago.

Lawrie delivered Toronto's first run in the second inning. Rasmus had doubled with two outs and Lawrie worked the count full on A's starter Trevor Cahill before pulling a single into left field.

In the second inning, Romero pitched into -- and out of -- a minor jam, a two-on, nobody out situation.

The Jays got some separation in the fourth when Edwin Encarnacion cashed Jose Bautista's leadoff walk with a single into left. Rasmus then doubled the count to 4-0 with his third home run as a Jay, a bomb to right field.

Adam Lind made it 5-0 for Toronto in the fifth when he cashed Eric Thames, who had walked, from second base with a single. Arencibia put the final punctuation mark on Cahill's evening, drilling a two-run single to score Rasmus and Lawrie in the top of the sixth.

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JAYS' ENCARNACION ON SECOND-HALF SURGE

Ken Fidlin

OAKLAND - No Blue Jay has done more than Edwin Encarnacion to improve his stock in this second half of the season.

In 247 at-bats before the all-star game, Encarnacion hit .255 with a .283 on-base percentage and an OPS of .688. In 106 at-bats since the break, Encarnacion is hitting .358, with a .477 on-base percentage and an OPS of 1.109.

"He's been much more disciplined to the strike zone," manager John Farrell said. "He's been confident getting deep in the count. If he takes a strike he doesn't become more anxious at the plate. He has almost two walks for every strikeout, which is amazing because the first half of the year he had 39 strikeouts and only nine walks.

"He's also grown in confidence knowing there's been more responsibility given him to hit in that spot in the order (No. 5) and he's earned it. He's a threat in the middle of our lineup."

SMOKIN' HOT

Adeiny Hechavarria has been on fire since he was promoted to triple-A Las Vegas.

In his first six games, Hechavarria was 14-for-25, with a .607 on-base percentage.

Pretty good start?

"I'd say," Farrell said. "He's only hitting .560. He's doing a great job. In talking with Tony (LaCava) and Alex (Anthopoulos), he might not have performed his way to double-A last year but when the move came something clicked inside him."

It looks as if the same thing has happened this time around.

MO THE THROW

Nestor Molina, a converted infielder, has some of the best numbers of any pitcher in the Blue Jays chain this year. Molina was 10-3 at class-A Dunedin,

with a 2.58 ERA. Since he has been promoted to double-A, he has three starts and is 2-0 with a 0.82 ERA. In 16 innings, he has allowed one earned run, struck out 16 and walked just one.

"The strikeouts compared to walks is phenomenal," Farrell said. "He's a guy who continues to grow and that's what player development is about. They start to mature and they grow."

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS FOR YOUNG BLUE JAYS PITCHERS

Ken Fidlin

OAKLAND - The more August advances toward September, the more you get the feeling that the Blue Jays are taking inventory, trying to get a fix on who is real and who's just taking up space.

As this team moves forward, especially once this season is in the books, the front office needs to have a fix on what it has as it tries to move to the next level.

"We are not making that the priority," manager John Farrell said. "It's important to us to win as many games as we can and to finish as high as we can, but we're also looking at guys who at this time next year or even in spring training, are going to be that much higher on the depth chart.

"Exposure at this time of year can go a long way to making them more of a known commodity next year."

At some point there comes a moment when a promising player either needs to deliver on that promise or be overtaken by the next hot prospect on the depth chart.

Pitchers like Luis Perez, Brad Mills, Henderson Alvarez and, perhaps, Joel Carreno are who we're talking about here.

Yesterday after three mediocre starts, Mills was sent to the minors and Perez was moved into the rotation, at least for Sunday's start here in Oakland. Mills' spot on the roster will be taken by Double A pitcher Carreno.

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As Farrell pointed out the other day when talking about Alvarez, there is no way to replicate the big-league environment except in the big leagues. It can be a cruel and unforgiving laboratory that can provide immediate and jarring feedback, as Mills has discovered.

In his three August starts, Mills lasted just 111/3 innings, gave up 15 hits, nine walks and 15 earned runs against three of the American league's weaker teams (Baltimore, Oakland and Seattle).

Big-league opportunity can also be a crucible upon which the foundation of a career can be built, as both Alvarez and Perez may be experiencing.

Farrell prefers to look at this move as a reward for Perez's quality work as opposed to a demotion for Mills' inability to keep the ball down.

"We think (Mills) could be an effective major-league pitcher as long as he keeps the ball down and throws strikes," Farrell said.

"When that isn't there, things can unravel on him. That wasn't the sole reason for this move. Certainly it factored into it but what we've seen out of Luis is why we're taking this step.

"From our discussions internally, it just felt like we wanted a chance to see Luis in that role because of the way he's thrown in the bullpen."

Carreno, a starter who struck out 152 in 134 innings at New Hampshire this year, will work out of the bullpen with the Jays. At 24, he has already pitched 587 minor-league innings and struck out 634 batters.

Alvarez, who will make his third start Saturday here against the Athletics, is looking like a kid ready to put the bit in his teeth and run with it.

"He's in a good place," said assistant GM Tony LaCava. "You look at his body language and you look at his temperament. He's totally relaxed. He looks like he belongs and he feels like he belongs.

"We'll get a good read on him and he'll get a good read on what he needs to do. He has a power arm. He gets it up to 97, with a lot of movement; movement that sometimes was too big. Commanding that kind of movement is tough."

What Farrell likes most about what he sees in Alvarez is his willingness to pitch to contact, even when he has men on base.

"The poise and the mound presence is what really stood out. He doesn't fear contact, in fact, he seems to seek it out even when he's in a bit of trouble.

"For 21 years old and coming straight out of double-A, he's handling himself very well."

Farrell has also been a big fan of Perez, for many of the same reasons: cool under pressure.

In relief of Mills in Seattle, Perez pitched four innings and gave up a run on three hits and two walks.

"He threw 61 pitches so (Sunday) we expect he'll throw a few more than that."

It's just another big opportunity for a young Blue Jays pitcher and it apparently is the season for it.

TVA SPORTS PARTNERS UP WITH SPORTSNET

DAVE POLLARD

TORONTO - TVA Sports is teaming up with Rogers Sportsnet to change the French-language sports TV landscape.

Rogers Communications is scrapping plans to launch its own French sports channel and will instead partner with Quebecor's new television venture that will launch next month.

TVA Group president and CEO Pierre Dion confirmed that an agreement had been reached with Rogers Sportsnet.

"I think it was a natural thing for both organizations," Dion said. "First of all it's a program acquisition and content partnership, but also a production partnership. We came to a tentative agreement that will benefit both organizations."

TVA Sports has already announced it will air 25 Ottawa Senators game during the 2011-12 season, 60 Toronto Blue Jays games next year, UFC fights, UEFA Champions League games and a number of

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top-flight boxing matches, including those featuring Canadian star Lucien Bute.

In addition, broadcast rights to the Montreal Impact, which will join Major League Soccer next year, were recently acquired to bolster TVA Sports' content package.

Rogers Sportsnet owns the exclusive broadcast rights to the Blue Jays and the Rogers Cup tennis tournament, among other properties.

"When the Jays and Senators are playing in Ontario, Sportsnet is obviously going to be there with its squad and equipment," Dion said. "And what TVA Sports is going to do is support them with more equipment and staff. That way we will offer a quality of product that has never been seen in Quebec.

"This will benefit sports organizations, athletes and fans. We will be able to offer a national broadcast to sports organizations but to the fans as well."

MLB NOTES: MLB ADMITS UMP BLEW CALL

QMI Agency

An umpire made an incorrect call on a disputed home run in a New York Yankees-Kansas City Royals game because he misunderstood the ground rules at Kauffman Stadium, MLB said Thursday.

Kansas City designated hitter Billy Butler was wrongly credited with a solo homer in the third inning Wednesday night, even though the shot was reviewed via instant replay, MLB executive vice-president Joe Torre said.

The ball hit the top of the left-field wall, a section of railing that is in play, and bounced back on to the field. Even after the review, crew chief Dana DeMuth ruled it was a homer. The Yanks lost, 5-4.

"(DeMuth) was very sure that that ball was a home run because it hit that back fence, which he thought was out of the park," Torre said.

Despite the obvious misunderstanding of the ground rules, Torre said the issue was moot and the final score stands. Yankees manager Joe Girardi didn't protest the game, which he must do prior to the next pitch after the incident, Torre said.

Girardi second-guessed himself for not doing so.

UMP BEST DESPITE BAD CALL

Umpire Jim Joyce has the respect of major leaguers, apparently, despite an awful call he made last year.

Joyce was voted the best umpire in baseball by 35% of the 237 MLB players who took part in a Sports Illustrated poll.

Joyce is the umpire who mistakenly called Jason Donald safe at first base, breaking up former Detroit Tiger Armando Galarraga's perfect game last June at Comerica Park.

Joyce got 35% of the vote. Rounding out the top five: Tim McClelland 18%, Jim Wolf 7%, Laz Diaz 6% and Joe West 5%.

Oddly, West also was voted the worst ump by 41% of the players.

BACK PAIN FOR YOUKILIS

Red Sox third baseman Kevin Youkilis is on his way to the disabled list.

Youkilis has discomfort in his lower back and will take a couple of weeks to rest. He has just four hits in his past 32 at-bats with one homer and two RBI.

Jed Lowrie and Mike Aviles are expected to share playing time at third base while Youkilis is sidelined.

The Red Sox have called up catcher Ryan Lavarney, 24, who is batting .293 with 30 homers and 85 RBI at double-A Portland and triple-A Pawtucket this season.

With David Ortiz dealing with right heel bursitis, Lavarney could get some at-bats at DH this weekend.

FRANCOEUR GETS DEAL

The Kansas City Royals have signed outfielder Jeff Francoeur to a two-year contract extension, reported to be worth \$13.5 million.

In 120 games this season, Francoeur is hitting .277 with 15 homers and 66 RBI.

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A first-round pick of the Atlanta Braves in 2002, Francoeur is a career .269 hitter with 116 home runs and 531 RBI, and a former Gold Glove winner.

Francoeur, 27, also has played for the New York Mets and Texas Rangers.

BRIEFLY

Alex Rodriguez has rejoined the New York Yankees but was not in the lineup Thursday night. He played the night before for triple-A Scranton/Wilkes-Barre to finish a rehabilitation assignment for his recovering right knee. Rodriguez had surgery July 11 to repair torn meniscus cartilage ... The Texas Rangers have acquired right-handed pitcher Tim Wood from the Pittsburgh Pirates for a player to be named or cash considerations. Wood was 0-3 with a 5.63 ERA in 13 relief appearances for the Pirates this season ... Veteran pitcher Paul Maholm has struggled since the all-star break and the Pirates almost certainly won't exercise a \$9.75-million club option for 2012. Maholm, 29, had a 2.96 ERA at the break, but he has gone 0-5 with a 5.75 ERA since. Maholm has made 179 starts the past five seasons, more than any other lefty in the NL ... Philadelphia Phillies centre fielder Shane Victorino had his three-game suspension reduced to two. Victorino was the only player suspended in a benches-clearing incident Aug. 5 against the San Francisco Giants.

FORMER BIG LEAGUER SUSPENDED FOR HGH

QMI Agency

Colorado Rockies minor leaguer Mike Jacobs became the first athlete in a North American pro sports league to be suspended for testing positive for human growth hormone, MLB said Thursday.

The 30-year-old first baseman, who has played six seasons in the major leagues, was suspended for 50 games after testing positive for HGH -- the first such case since MLB instituted blood tests for doping in the minor leagues a year ago.

Jacobs, who has played for the New York Mets, Florida Marlins and Kansas City Royals, was leading the Rockies' triple-A club in Colorado Springs in home runs (23), doubles (30) and RBI (97).

The Rockies announced they were releasing Jacobs.

"It is yet further indication of the fact that the test works and that it should be used more widely," World Anti-Doping Agency chief David Howman said in a statement.

"It is clear that HGH is one of the biggest threats to sport right now and has been for many years. Athletes have taken it with impunity because it was not detectable."

Jacobs said he took HGH to try to recover from injuries.

"A few weeks ago, in an attempt to overcome knee and back problems, I made the terrible decision to take HGH," Jacobs said in a statement.

"I apologize to my family, friends, the Colorado Rockies organization, Major League Baseball and to the fans."

Jacobs has a .253 batting average with 100 home runs and 310 RBI in 556 major league games.

He said he hopes to make a comeback after serving the suspension.

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STRAIGHT A'S FOR ROMERO AS JAYS WIN 7-0

Mark Zwolinski

OAKLAND — Jays ace Ricky Romero won his fifth-straight game Thursday night, and that should spark more serious conversation around baseball about his place among the elite pitchers in the game this season.

Romero, even though he didn't have his best stuff, managed himself and his pitches extremely well in a 7-0 Jays win over Oakland before 12,220 at the Coliseum.

This wasn't Brandon Morrow's smoke show in Seattle the night before. Romero is capable of piling

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up strikeouts, but it was apparent Thursday night that he would need a display of pitching smarts and game management.

He did just that — staying away from walks, using his defence, and managing the trouble spots he got into by limiting the damage of the A's best hitters. He also pitched to more manageable hitters to work out those trouble spots.

In all, it was mastery in workman's clothing. Romero got mostly flies and grounders, all of them early in the count. That meant he had the A's thinking about swinging early in the count to avoid seeing his devastating changeup — and Romero used that to great affect.

He cruised to a complete-game shutout, scattering three hits, bagging that fifth win, and improving to 12-9. In those five wins, he has tossed 40.1 innings, allowing only 14 hits.

"I feel in control now," said Romero, who retired the final 14 A's in order.

"I'm trying to slow the game down, and when I pitch ahead, that's when I'm at my best."

While Romero was being a consummate pro, his mates threw up 10 hits and continued to show the quality offence that has characterized this west coast swing so far.

Colby Rasmus, who is squaring up balls almost routinely, and is on top of his smooth swing the past few days, knocked a long two-run homer in a three-run fourth, which was his third homer as a Jay.

Brett Lawrie had an RBI single and a double, while Edwin Encarnacion knocked in another run to continue his torrid hitting pace since the turn of July.

Lawrie entered the game batting .357, with three homers and nine RBIs. There is a chance, if he finishes the season as strongly as he has started it, for rookie of the year mentions. Lawrie needs a minimum of 130 at-bats to enter that race, and will easily surpass that total (barring any setbacks).

Jose Bautista walked for the 99th time this season, and is one free pass away from setting a new Jays record. Carlos Delgado walked 100 times in 130 games in 2000. Bautista has 99 in 112.

"Just a great night up and down the lineup for us tonight. We had six runners at second and cashed in every one of them," Jays manager John Farrell said.

Romero, meanwhile, posted his 19th quality start in 25 outings, an inspiring run which should take him at least into conversations as one of the top six or seven pitchers in the American League.

Romero's record falls short of Cy Young front runners Jared Weaver and Justin Verlander, but that result has largely been out of his control. Toronto is 13-12 in his starts, and has scored only 24 runs in the 12 losses.

The run of five straight wins — and the fact the season is in the second half — also underline a new facet of Romero's pitching. The lefty appears to be overcoming a trend in his first two seasons where his performance tailed off in the second half of the season.

"You try to take care of your body and you learn things as time goes by," Romero said. "You also try and step back in games and not do too much. That's slowing the game down and what I'm trying to do."

Romero wasn't as sharp or dominating as he has been, but he certainly turned in a professional pitching performance to go along with his club's continued hot hitting.

The third inning for Oakland appeared a serious hurdle to Romero's night. The home side loaded the bases, thanks to a Yunel Escobar error on a routine grounder to open the frame (he went to his backhand and had the ball glance off his glove).

Cliff Pennington doubled and Josh Willingham walked to complete the threat for the A's. Romero was dealing with the heart of the order there, and while he faced three runners aboard, he managed the situation with the right foresight.

Brandon Allen came up with the A's first hope for a run, looking to crack Romero with the bases loaded. Allen has been something of a new-found star in Oakland, filling in for an injured Conor Jackson last weekend and sticking in the lineup with a hot bat.

Romero, though, should win a battle against a raw rookie, and he did. Working inside to Allen, he got

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the first baseman to pop up in foul territory along the first base side for the final out of the inning.

The rest of the way, Romero gave up singles, but nothing more. He didn't walk anyone after the third, which meant he didn't make things harder on himself.

His defence — especially Lawrie, with some nice plays at third — made plays, and the result was a nicely crafted shutout.

NOTES: Toronto optioned Brad Mills to Las Vegas Thursday after the lefty gave up 12 runs in his last two outings. Lefty Luis Perez will take Mills start Sunday in Oakland. Toronto also called up Las Vegas starter Joel Carreno and will have him pitch out of the bullpen.

BLUE JAYS SEND DOWN PITCHER BRAD MILLS TO VEGAS

AP

OAKLAND, CALIF. — The Toronto Blue Jays have optioned struggling starting pitcher Brad Mills to triple-A Las Vegas two days after the left-hander's second consecutive rough outing.

Mills is 1-2 with an 8.35 ERA in four starts for Toronto this season. Since beating Baltimore on Aug. 5, he has allowed 12 earned runs in six innings.

In Mills' most recent outing against Seattle, the 26-year-old was tagged for six runs and six hits in three innings.

Left-hander Luis Perez, who earned the win in relief of Mills on Sunday, will move into the rotation. Perez (2-2) is scheduled to start Saturday at Oakland.

Toronto didn't make a corresponding move Thursday but plan to call up right-hander Joel Carreno from double-A New Hampshire.

BLUE JAYS SHUT OUT ATHLETICS

AP

Ricky Romero pitched a three-hitter to extend his career-high winning streak to five games, Colby Rasmus homered and scored three times and the Toronto Blue Jays beat the Oakland Athletics 7-0 on Thursday night.

Edwin Encarnacion and Brett Lawrie had RBI singles while Jose Bautista doubled and scored in the fourth when Toronto scored three times off Oakland starter Trevor Cahill to break the game open.

Romero struck out six and walked two while recording his second shutout this season and third of his career. He had to pitch out of a series of jams early then retired the final 13 batters he faced.

The A's got only two runners to third base and were shut out for the 12th time this season.

Rasmus, acquired from St. Louis as part of an eight-player trade on July 27, doubled and scored in the second then hit a towering two-run drive off Cahill in the fourth. The home run, Rasmus' third with Toronto and 14th overall, caromed off a sign hanging from the second deck in right field and gave Toronto a 4-0 lead.

He also singled leading off the sixth for his first three-hit game since the trade.

Before getting to Cahill, Rasmus had been mired in a 16 for 71 funk (.225) with his new club.

Encarnacion, meanwhile, remained one of the hottest hitters in the American League. The Blue Jays designated hitter singled in Bautista in the fourth and scored on Rasmus' home run. He has reached safely in 17 consecutive games.

Romero (12-9) did the rest, although the left-hander labored at times.

He pitched out of a two-on, no-out jam in the second then wriggled out of trouble again after Oakland loaded the bases in the third by getting hot-hitting Brandon Allen to foul out to first. Allen, called up from the minors on Saturday, was in a 9 for 16 stretch before popping out.

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Romero, who shut out the St. Louis Cardinals on four hits June 6, settled down after that and allowed only one hit the rest of the way. He improved to 4-0 in five career starts against the A's.

Adam Lind added an RBI single off Cahill in the fifth and J.P. Arenciba drove in two runs in the sixth to chase the Oakland right-hander, who is in the worst slump of his career,

Cahill (9-12) allowed seven runs and nine hits over 5 1-3 innings and lost for the seventh time in his last 10 starts. Since beginning the season 6-0, Cahill is 3-12 with a 5.30 ERA.

The A's fell to 2-5 on their homestand.

Notes: Toronto has homered in 12 straight games. ... A's manager Bob Melvin made his pitchers take fielding practice prior to the game. Oakland went into the night tied with Texas for most errors in the AL. ... The A's placed RHP Trystan Magnuson on the 15-day disabled list with tendinitis in his pitching shoulder and called up LHP Jordan Norberto from Triple-A Sacramento. ... Toronto optioned struggling starting pitcher Brad Mills to Triple-A Las Vegas two days after the left-hander's second consecutive rough outing. Since beating Baltimore on Aug. 5, he has allowed 12 earned runs in six innings. ... LHP Luis Perez, who earned the win in relief of Mills on Sunday, is scheduled take Mills' spot in the rotation and start Saturday at Oakland. ... The Blue Jays plan to call up right-hander Joel Carrero from Double-A New Hampshire. ... LHP Brett Cecil (4-5) goes for his first win since July 29 when he pitches for the Blue Jays on Friday. Cecil took the loss against Oakland on Aug. 9 when he allowed three runs in seven innings. ... RHP Rich Harden (3-2), who beat the Blue Jays on Aug. 9, pitches for the A's.

FORMER BLUE JAY MOLITOR AGREES WITH PETE ROSE BAN

AP

Baseball Hall of Famer Paul Molitor idolized Pete Rose while growing up in Minnesota, though he sides with Major League Baseball when it comes to the career hits leader's chances of joining him in Cooperstown.

Rose was banned for life in 1989 for betting on baseball games. The former Cincinnati Reds manager and player has petitioned MLB, but commissioner Bud Selig has given no indication he's leaning toward reinstating Rose, who amassed a record 4,256 hits

"It's a very controversial topic and will be. I agree with the commissioner and only because, my way of looking at it, the one rule that Major League Baseball reads to every player every year in clubhouses across America is that if you gamble on baseball, it will be a lifetime ban from the game," Molitor said Thursday a news conference before throwing out the ceremonial first pitch at the Little League World Series.

"So if they decide to let Pete in because he's the all-time hit leader, then every time (players) heard that rule, it would have no meaning," added Molitor in responding to a question about whether Rose belonged in the Hall of Fame. "Other people have done a lot of things that you can argue are possibly worse, but they weren't things that they had previously known if they did there would be a lifetime ban on baseball."

Molitor was pretty good at the plate himself, with 3,319 hits and a .306 average over a 21-year career that ended in 1998. But it was his pitching prowess that first got Molitor noticed on the baseball diamond while growing up.

A native of St. Paul, Minn., Molitor said parents of players on his youth teams asked coaches to move him up to the a higher division because the right-hander threw too hard.

"I don't think they had radar guns back then," said Molitor, who turns 55 on Aug. 22, "but for a long time my dreams of being a major league player were about being a pitcher."

Molitor was impressed with South Williamsport in his first visit to the World Series. His ceremonial first pitch was a strike down the middle of the plate.

"The key with hitting, even at a young age, is the ability to be patient in the batter's box," said Molitor, who met with Little Leaguers on Wednesday. "Hitting even at a young level, is about being able to see it before you decide what you're going to do with it."

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BURKE, ANTHOPOULOS SHARE A VISION

Damien Cox

It was an evening on which Brandon Morrow threw flames, Colby Rasmus hit a home run, Yunel Escobar got on base as a leadoff man should while playing flawless shortstop and Brett Lawrie delivered hustle and broke up a double play.

You know, the kind of evening Brian Burke hopes to have on more than a few nights this season with the Maple Leafs.

There's lots of common ground, you see, between Alex Anthopoulos's Blue Jays and Burke's Leafs, including the fact both have been out of the playoff mix for years and they are only the latest executives to try and end the drought.

Both are pushing forward with very young rosters, and the intriguing similarity is that both men have used the trade route to acquire key pieces of the foundations they are seeking to build.

Draft and develop? Sure, that too. But both have sought to accelerate the success curve of their teams by aggressively working the trade market, and not just for spare parts and complementary pieces, but for core players.

Both are known to be extremely active and inventive trading partners willing to take a risk in a deal and even make a mistake. The intriguing element to this strategy is that to some degree it means they are willing to take a chance on players deemed expendable by other clubs.

For Anthopoulos, the quartet of Morrow (Mariners), Rasmus (Cardinals), Escobar (Braves) and Lawrie (Brewers) were acquired to a large extent because their former teams were uncertain what to do with them, or how to utilize their talents, or had decided they weren't solid citizens.

Ditto for the Leafs when it comes to Phil Kessel (Bruins), Dion Phaneuf and Keith Aulie (Flames) and Cody Franson (Predators). Like the performances the Jays got from their youngsters in a victory in Seattle on Wednesday night, the Leafs are desperately hoping all four will be major contributors this season

as the club tries to make post-season play for the first time since 2004.

Comparing the two sports, and their management, is anything but exact. The NHL operates under a salary cap, Major League Baseball does not. The entry drafts for the two sports are very different. The Leafs have used their wealth as aggressively as possible under a cap system. The Jays have money to spend, but are holding their fire, we're told, until the time is right.

Both GMs have also had to use their smarts to move bad contracts, with the Leafs getting rid of Jason Blake and Vesa Toskala after Burke's predecessors were forced to buy out the likes of Darcy Tucker, Tie Domi and Ed Belfour, and the Jays finally able to find another club to take the enormous contract of Vernon Wells.

Anthopoulos has had to do something Burke hasn't, and that's make a deal sending a franchise player elsewhere. The returns for Roy Halladay will need time to evaluate, but they're promising, although none of the players are at the big-league level.

Burke, meanwhile, only had to trade away Tomas Kaberle.

Neither seems afraid to steer away from difficult decisions, even if they might compromise the future. Anthopoulos chose not to sign the club's first-round pick, pitcher Tyler Beede, because he wanted too much money, while Burke was willing to send two first-round picks to Boston for Kessel, a trade that will be debated for years.

When Anthopoulos was hired, he inherited Aaron Hill, J.P. Arencibia, Ricky Romero, Eric Thames and Brett Cecil, among others, and has traded to add prospects like Anthony Gose and Travis d'Arnaud.

James Reimer, Nik Kulemin, Carl Gunnarsson, Luke Schenn and Matt Frattin were already in the Leaf system when Burke arrived, and his trades have added prospects like Jake Gardiner and Joe Colborne.

Parallels aside, which team is further ahead? The Jays appear to be, particularly given their challenging division. But Burke and Co. are oozing confidence that the changes on the coaching staff, addition of

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Tim Connolly to play centre and solid late-season record will get them to the post-season in 2012.

The GMs of these two local squads seem to have similar ideas about team-building. Indeed, Anthopoulos invited Leaf execs Dave Poulin and Claude Loiselle to sit in during this year's baseball amateur draft.

Burke knows Anthopoulos, and has been known to tip a pint with Paul Beeston. A little co-operation, perhaps, will help get both teams where they want to go.

NATIONAL POST
Friday, August 19, 2011

JAYS DEMOTE MILLS, CALL UP CARRENO

.John Lott

The Toronto Blue Jays have reached into Double-A once again in their search for pitching help.

Joel Carreno, in the midst of a standout season at New Hampshire, has been called up and will join the club on Friday to pitch out of the bullpen, manager John Farrell told reporters before Thursday night's game in Oakland. Starter Brad Mills was optioned to Triple-A Las Vegas, with reliever Luis Perez taking his place in the rotation.

Carreno, 24, is 7-9 with a 3.41 ERA as a starter at Double-A. In 134 innings, he has allowed 100 hits, struck out 152 and walked 68.

Last week the Jays promoted Henderson Alvarez, another Double-A starter, after Carlos Villanueva went on the disabled list.

Mills was called up from Las Vegas on July 27 and inserted into the rotation after Jo-Jo Reyes was designated for assignment. The soft-tossing left-hander pitched reasonably well in his first two starts, then gave up 12 runs in just six innings over his next two. In four starts his ERA was 8.35.

As late as Wednesday, Farrell said the Jays planned to start Mills on Sunday. But a day later, he said

Perez, who has been a starter in the minors, will fill in for Mills on Sunday.

HENTGEN KEEPSIT SIMPLE INBULLPEN

John Lott

Pat Hentgen is a rarity among bullpen coaches. He can give his pupils first-hand scouting reports on Derek Jeter, David Ortiz, Johnny Damon and a host of other contemporary hitters.

Hentgen pitched against those guys.

Of course, he also faced players already in the Hall of Fame, including Cal Ripken, Wade Boggs and Paul Molitor. And at 42, the former Cy Young Award winner looks like he might still sneak a pitch or two past a big-league batter.

In his first year as a fulltime coach for his old team, Hentgen retains the military posture and game face that Toronto fans came to know well during his decade as a Blue Jays pitcher. After starting and ending his 14-year career in a Jays uniform, Hentgen accepted new manager John Farrell's invitation to wear it again.

He established a quick and relaxed rapport with his troops.

"He loves to talk shop, as he calls it," veteran reliever Shawn Camp said. "The biggest thing about him is he's approachable. He's been there, done that, worked as a reliever as well as a starter. He's just got so much knowledge."

Hentgen eased into this job. He retired during the 2004 season, went home to Shelby Township, Mich., and enjoyed the time with his wife Darlene and their three daughters, now 16, 14 and 11. Three years later, he began working as a guest coach in spring training and the fall instructional league, and last year became a part-time roving coach for Toronto's farm clubs.

General manager Alex Anthopoulos was impressed with Hentgen's work and invited him to interview with Farrell for the bullpen position. On his way to a University of Michigan football game last fall, Farrell

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stopped for a twohour breakfast with Hentgen and two days later offered him the job.

It was not a slam-dunk decision for Hentgen, who enjoyed his time at home, free from gruelling travel. But the itch was there. He discussed it with his family, then said yes.

"My family's been great," he said. "My wife's a great baseball wife. We've been together since '87. I signed in '86, so she's been with me the whole way."

The transition was smooth. He knew his employer well - "I've always been proud to be part of the organization" - he knew many of the players and he knew pitching coach Bruce Walton, who was the bullpen coach during Hentgen's final season with Toronto.

Even so, as spring training neared, the rookie coach had a few moments when he was concerned about proving himself.

"Yeah, part of me was concerned," he said. "But I think I felt that communication with the players - on the bus, on the plane, during batting practice - there's so much value in that, and I just felt like I'd be OK in that, because I spent 18 years [in the minors and majors] in the clubhouse as a player.

"That clubhouse atmosphere is probably where I feel most comfortable. I felt like that would be an easy transition."

A three-time all-star as a starter, Hentgen pitched in 344 games, only 38 as a reliever. But aside from spending nine innings in the bullpen every night, he adjusted quickly to his new fraternity.

When a pitcher prepares for the call, Hentgen reminds him about the first few batters he will face and who might come off the bench to pinchhit. Otherwise, his message is uncluttered.

"For the most part, they're only going in for three outs, so they need to stay with their strengths," he said. "I try to relay to them, 'Don't get caught up in advance [scouting] reports and what guys are doing. Focus on what you need to do as a pitcher. Execute one pitch at a time, hit your spots, attack and you'll end up having a clean inning.' "

Lately, it has often not worked out that way for a bullpen destabilized by trades (Jason Frasor, Marc Rzepczynski, Octavio Dotel) and injury (Jon Rauch). Three shutout innings to finish Wednesday night's win in Seattle brought welcome relief for the relievers.

Throughout the rough patches, pitchers appreciate Hentgen's even keel, Camp said.

"He's always positive, even in times of struggle," Camp said. "He's also an intense guy. Not a lot slips by him.

"If I want to talk about something that happened three days ago, he goes right to the situation and knows exactly what it was. You don't get a lot of guys like that."

Walton is like that too, which explains why he and Hentgen "are best buddies off the field," Camp added.

As a player, Hentgen earned respect for his character and work ethic as well as his results. He considered himself more workhorse than thoroughbred, even though he averaged 14 wins for the Jays during his seven peak years.

"I wasn't a guy that was gifted with a 95-mile-an-hour fastball or a [Justin] Verlander changeup or anything like that," he said. "I relied on location and preparation and competitiveness.

"I think those are some of the things I can instill in some of the guys in the 'pen."

Ask any Jays reliever, and he will say Hentgen likes to keep instructions simple.

"The first thing you think about as you get ready to go in the game is the situation," Camp said. "And then the last thing you hear coming out of the bullpen is him saying, 'Get that first guy.' "

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MINOR-LEAGUE BASEBALL PLAYER SUSPENDED AFTER POSITIVE HGH TEST

.John Lott

A former major-league slugger has been suspended for 50 games after testing positive for human growth hormone while playing in the minors.

Mike Jacobs, who hit 100 homers and drove in 310 runs over five-plus seasons in the majors, is the first North American athlete suspended for failing an HGH test. He was enjoying a productive season for Colorado Springs in the Pacific Coast League, batting .298 with 23 homers and 97 RBIs.

HGH is not part of the major leagues' drug-testing protocol, but minor leaguers can be tested because they are not part of the MLB players' union. MLB started HGH testing in the minors last year.

Jacobs was playing for the Colorado Rockies' Triple-A affiliate. Shortly after MLB issued a two-paragraph news release on the suspension, the Rockies announced they had released Jacobs.

On Twitter, Rockies' TV analyst and Hall of Fame baseball writer Tracy Ringolsby said Jacobs "apologized for taking HGH. Said he used them to try and deal with knee and back problems. Said it was horrible decision."

In their new collective bargaining agreement, the National Football League and its players have agreed to random HGH testing, which is a blood test. While baseball tests for steroids and other performance-enhancing substances, the MLB players' union has always resisted HGH testing, arguing that it is unreliable, among other things.

Jacobs, 30, last played in the majors in 2010, appearing in seven games for the New York Mets. With the Florida Marlins from 2006 to 2008, he hit 69 homers and drove in 224 runs.

BLUE JAYS.COM
Friday, August 19, 2011

RED-HOT ROMERO DOMINATES A'S IN OPENER

By Gregor Chisholm / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- It's sometimes easy to forget Ricky Romero had his fair share of skeptics at the start of the season.

The 26-year-old was pushed to the front of Toronto's starting rotation following the departure of No. 1 starter Shaun Marcum. Now, with less than six weeks left in the season, it's hard to believe the doubts ever existed.

Romero further cemented his place among the elite pitchers in the American League with his third career shutout in a lopsided 7-0 victory over the Athletics on Thursday night at the Coliseum.

"Everything feels good, right now," said Romero, who has now won a career high five consecutive starts. "I'm attacking the zone, I'm being consistent with my pitches and not panicking in situations like I had in the first few innings.

"I feel in control, right now, and I'm trying to slow the game down when I'm out there -- and just trying to take it pitch by pitch. When I pitch ahead, I think that's when I'm at my best."

Romero put forth a masterful performance by allowing just three hits and two walks, while striking out six, in his fourth complete game of the year.

The third-year starter has a 0.89 ERA in his past five outings, and has thrown at least seven innings in each of those starts.

Romero seems to have an effortless approach every time he is on the mound against Oakland, and improved to a perfect 4-0 with a 1.49 ERA against the club during his career.

"He comes right after you, kinda similar to Cliff Lee -- uses his fastball a lot to both sides of the plate, had a really good changeup," said catcher Kurt Suzuki, who went 0-for-3. "We didn't get a pitch to hit.

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"It's one of those things you can't be passive, because if you do, you're going to be behind in the count. So it's either put the ball in play or get behind in the count, which you don't want to do."

The Athletics' biggest threat occurred during the third, when they loaded the bases on an error, a double and a walk. With two outs, Romero zeroed in and got first baseman Brandon Allen to pop out in foul territory to end the frame.

Romero then continued on, and retired 16 of 17 batters to finish out the game. The California native has posted 19 quality starts in 25 outings this season.

"I think I learned that back in college, dealing with situations like that," Romero said of the early jams. "Obviously, you continue to get better as years go by and as you mature as a pitcher.

"You're always taught that less is more, and you just kind of take [things] pitch by pitch. This game will kill you if you're thinking two, three hitters ahead. I just focus on the pitch."

Romero's impressive run comes at a time when he used to struggle in previous seasons. He posted a 4.07 ERA in August during 2010, and a 5.32 ERA during that month in 2009. Historically, those woes continued into the month of September. But this season, he appears to be getting stronger with each start.

Thursday night marked his sixth consecutive outing tossing at least seven innings, and Romero says he's primed for a strong finish to the year.

"I feel great, my arm has been bouncing back really good, which is important," said Romero, who had his father, two sisters and brother in attendance. "It's a credit to the trainers that we have here. They're doing a good job, and I'm taking care of myself.

"Every year, you kind of learn a little bit more about your body, and I'm doing small things to kind of get in there and make sure my arm stays fresh."

The Blue Jays helped Romero gain his 12th win of the season by getting on the scoreboard in the top of the second. Colby Rasmus got the rally started with a two-out double, and he eventually came

around to score on an RBI single by rookie Brett Lawrie.

Toronto added one in the fourth on an RBI single by Edwin Encarnacion, before Rasmus went back to work. The 24-year-old center fielder sent a 1-0 hanging curveball from starter Trevor Cahill deep in to the right-field seats.

Rasmus' third homer in a Blue Jays uniform -- and 14th of the season -- gave Toronto an early 4-0 lead. The native of Columbus, Ga., is riding a five-game hitting streak, and has two homers and seven RBIs in his past three contests.

"I think more than anything, he has slowed down his lower half," Blue Jays manager John Farrell said of the reasons behind Rasmus' recent run. "He is not as violent, not as quick with his leg kick, and he's gaining some timing and rhythm at the plate.

"The bat speed is clearly there. The power, he obviously showed it tonight. On this road trip, he has put together some very good swings on some pitches."

The Blue Jays extended their lead with another run in the fifth on an RBI single by Adam Lind. Catcher J.P. Arencibia put the finishing touches on Cahill with a two-run single in the sixth.

Cahill was removed from the game following Arencibia's at-bat, and was charged with seven runs on nine hits and two walks en route to his 12th loss of the season.

Rasmus, Lawrie and Arencibia combined to go 6-for-11 with three extra-base hits and five RBIs on the night. Toronto has now won five of its past six games, and is four games above .500 for the first time this season.

A'S LOOKING FOR ANSWERS VS. BLUE JAYS

By Avi Zaleon / MLB.com

Oakland starter Rich Harden needs lightning to strike twice on Friday against a Toronto offense that shows no signs of cooling down after a dominant 7-0 victory to open the series.

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Although Harden has struggled overall in nine career starts against the Blue Jays, who have homered in 12 consecutive games, the right-hander found success recently against his tormentors. Harden is 1-3 with a 5.11 ERA against the Jays, with that lone win coming on August 9, as he went seven innings, allowing one run on five hits, with two walks and eight strikeouts.

"From the first inning on, [the Blue Jays] were really aggressive, and there are a lot of guys in the lineup that can hurt you, hit a home run at any time, especially in this park," Harden said at the time. "That's what they do."

Toronto continued to take advantage of the long ball on Thursday, as center fielder Colby Rasmus' fourth-inning blast gave the Jays an American League-best 24 homers during the month of August. In the 12-game span dating back to Aug. 4, Toronto has 20 home runs.

"Home runs are going to happen," Blue Jays manager John Farrell said. "When we try to hit home runs, that's when we get in trouble. Home runs are going to happen when you get into good counts and you put good swings on a ball. And if not, take your walk and pass it on to the next guy."

"That's the type of offense that has to be constructed to win this division."

Toronto will send Brett Cecil to the mound on Friday, looking to build on Thursday's victory.

Blue Jays: Mills optioned to Triple-A

- Southpaw Brad Mills was optioned to Triple-A Las Vegas on Thursday afternoon, and the Blue Jays are expected to recall right-hander Joel Carreno in a corresponding roster move on Friday. The roster move paves the way for reliever Luis Perez to move into the starting rotation. In four starts with Toronto, Mills compiled a 8.35 ERA, including 12 earned runs in his last two outings.

A's: Magnuson to DL, Norberto recalled

- Right-hander Trystan Magnuson, who has been battling right shoulder tendinitis, was put on the 15-day disabled list on Thursday, with southpaw Jordan Norberto being called up from Triple-A Sacramento to fill the roster spot and give Oakland another arm in the bullpen. A's manager Bob Melvin said Magnuson should be ready to return when he is eligible on Sept. 1. Norberto is starting his second

stint with the A's, having made four relief appearances earlier in the month that resulted in a 3.60 ERA.

- Conor Jackson's return to A's lineup on Thursday landed him in left field, instead of his usual spot at first base. Jackson, who had missed four games with neck stiffness, found himself in the outfield because of the recent play of first baseman Brandon Allen. Since being called up on Saturday, Allen has gone 9-for-19 (.474) and showed defensive consistency.

Worth noting

- Shortstop prospect Adeiny Hechavarria appears to be adjusting well to life at Triple-A. The 22-year-old entered play on Thursday night hitting .560 (14-for-25), with three doubles and three walks in six games since being promoted from Double-A.

- A's hurlers took part in pitchers' fielding practice, commonly known as PFP, before Thursday's game. As a team, the A's have committed 101 errors, which is tied with Texas for second-most in the Majors behind only the Cubs (103). Seventeen of the miscues have been made by pitchers.

MILLS OPTIONED TO TRIPLE-A

By Gregor Chisholm / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The Blue Jays optioned left-hander Brad Mills to Triple-A on Thursday afternoon, which paves the way for reliever Luis Perez to transition into the starting rotation.

Mills made four starts in Toronto, and posted an 8.35 ERA in 18 1/3 innings. The Arizona native really struggled during his past two outings with the club, allowing 12 earned runs in just six innings.

The 26-year-old's fastball typically tops out around 86-87 mph, and that lack of high velocity means Mills has to rely on pinpoint command. That's something he was unable to do during his third stint in the big leagues.

"When that isn't quite there, that's when things can unravel on him a little bit," manager John Farrell said. "But that wasn't the sole reason behind this move. Certainly, it factored into it. But what we have seen out of Luis, that's [why] we're taking this next step."

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The decision came as a bit of a surprise, because Farrell stated on Wednesday that Mills was going to start on Sunday in Oakland. There were additional internal conversations about Perez later that night and again on Thursday, which prompted the team to reverse course.

Perez came on in relief of Mills during Tuesday night's game in Seattle. He allowed just one run in four innings en route to his second win of the season.

The Dominican native has posted a 3.71 ERA in 43 2/3 innings out of Toronto's bullpen this season. Perez has struck out 37, while walking just 15 -- and proved effective in the long-relief role.

Perez came up through the Minor Leagues as a starting pitcher, and his manager felt like he deserved an opportunity to perform in that role at the big league level.

"Just felt like the way Luis has thrown, this is a chance to see him in that role," Farrell said. "We bounced that idea back and forth throughout the course of this year. ... This provides that opportunity to take a look at him as a starter."

BLUE JAYS PLAN TO RECALL CARRENO ON FRIDAY

OAKLAND -- The Blue Jays will recall right-hander Joel Carreno prior to Friday night's game against Oakland.

The 24-year-old will fill the void left on the club's 25-man roster following the departure of Brad Mills, who was optioned to Triple-A on Thursday.

Carreno made 23 starts this season for Double-A New Hampshire, but will be used exclusively out of the bullpen in Toronto.

"He has an above-average slider," Blue Jays manager John Farrell said. "His velocity has been a tick above average -- he's in that 91-93-mph [range]."

"The one thing that he showed in Spring Training, much like Henderson [Alvarez] and Luis [Perez] -- they come to this level and [have] not been intimidated. He had very good mound presence in

Spring Training, and we're looking forward to seeing the same."

Carreno posted a 7-9 record with a 3.41 ERA in 134 2/3 innings this year. He struck out 152 with 68 walks in his first season above Class A.

Farrell said the club will ease the Dominican native into his new role because of his lack of experience in relief. Carreno has made just one appearance this season out of the bullpen, but pitched exclusively in that role during Spring Training.

"We know there's going to be a little bit of a transition," Farrell said. "We'll finish off an inning with a guy that has been a reliever ... just to buy enough time to make sure a starter coming into the bullpen has ample time to get loose."

MORROW REACHES OUT TO WELLS VIA TWITTER

OAKLAND -- Brandon Morrow reached out to outfielder Casper Wells on Twitter following a scary incident on Wednesday night in Seattle.

Morrow threw a 97-mph fastball up and in to Wells during the sixth inning of Toronto's 5-1 win. The ball hit the tip of Wells' nose. But an inch or two in the other direction could have caused massive damage to the Michigan native.

Toronto's right-hander went online to ensure there was no hard feelings between the two players.

"Casper, sorry about the pitch that got away tonight," wrote Morrow, a former Mariner. "I'm glad it didn't get you too bad. Enjoy Seattle, it's a great city."

It didn't take long for Wells to respond and officially bury the hatchet.

"No worries man," Wells wrote. "Just grazed the schnaz a little bit, nothing serious. And Seattle is amazing."

The incident could have been much worse, but Wells was able to escape without a major injury. Following the incident, Morrow watched from the mound as Wells received medical attention.

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After the game, Morrow felt nothing but relief that the reports indicated Wells was going to be fine.

"I couldn't tell live where it exactly got him, and the way he reacted I was worried about it," Morrow said. "But I heard it just tipped his nose and the X-rays are negative, so I'm glad he's all right."

WORTH NOTING

- Shortstop prospect Adeiny Hechavarria appears to be adjusting well to life at Triple-A. The 22-year-old entered play on Thursday night hitting .560 (14-for-25), with three doubles and three walks in six games since being promoted from Double-A.
- Outfielder Travis Snider is batting .424 (14-for-33), with two home runs and 13 RBIs in nine games, since being optioned to Triple-A Las Vegas. The 23-year-old also has a double and four walks during that span.

SPORTSNET.CA
Friday, August 19, 2011

ROMERO, RASMUS LEAD JAYS OVER ATHLETICS

AP

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Ricky Romero pitched as calmly with runners in scoring position as he did with the bases empty.

Not even pitching in front of his father and siblings was enough to rattle the Toronto left-hander, who is in the middle of the finest stretch of his career.

Romero pitched a three-hitter to extend his career-high winning streak to five games and the Blue Jays, getting a big night from Colby Rasmus, beat the Oakland Athletics 7-0 on Tuesday night.

"He pitched like he's been on the run for the last five or six outings," Toronto manager John Farrell said. "He was down in the strike zone, he was efficient. When he gets in that rhythm he doesn't try to do anything more than what the situation's calling for."

Romero (12-9) struck out six and walked two while recording his second shutout this season and third of his career. He had to pitch out of a series of jams early then retired the final 13 batters he faced.

He laboured at times but worked out of trouble to remain unbeaten in five starts against Oakland.

"Everything feels good right now," Romero said. "I'm attacking the zone, being consistent with my pitches and not panicking in situations like I had in those first few innings. I feel in control right now."

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Romero pitched out of a two-on, no-out jam in the second then wriggled out of trouble again after Oakland loaded the bases in the third by getting hot-hitting Brandon Allen to foul out to first. Allen, called up from the minors on Saturday, was in a 9-for-16 stretch before popping out.

Romero, who shut out the St. Louis Cardinals on four hits June 6, settled down after that and allowed only one hit the rest of the way. He improved to 4-0 in five career starts against the A's.

"What he's done is slow the game down mentally," Farrell said. "He's not rushed into any pitches ... and in key spots he's made some big pitches."

Rasmus homered and scored three times for the Blue Jays. Edwin Encarnacion and Brett Lawrie, from Langley, B.C., had RBI singles while Jose Bautista doubled and scored in the fourth when Toronto scored three times off Oakland starter Trevor Cahill to break the game open.

Cahill (9-12) allowed seven runs and nine hits over 5 1-3 innings and lost for the seventh time in his last 10 starts. Since beginning the season 6-0, the right-hander is 3-12 with a 5.30 ERA.

"We've had inconsistencies across the board at times so when a guy like him has some struggles, everybody feels it," Oakland manager Bob Melvin said. "He's not the only one and it's not like he's all the sudden lost his stuff. He's just having a difficult time being consistent."

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Rasmus, acquired from St. Louis as part of an eight-player trade on July 27, doubled and scored in the second then hit a towering two-run drive off Cahill in the fourth. The home run, Rasmus' third with Toronto and 14th overall, caromed off a sign hanging from the second deck in right field and gave Toronto a 4-0 lead.

He also singled leading off the sixth for his first three-hit game since the trade.

Before getting to Cahill, Rasmus had been mired in a 16-for-71 funk (.225) with his new club.

Encarnacion, meanwhile, remained one of the hottest hitters in the American League. The Blue Jays designated hitter singled in Bautista in the fourth and scored on Rasmus' home run. He has reached safely in 17 consecutive games.

Adam Lind added an RBI single off Cahill in the fifth and J.P. Arencibia drove in two runs in the sixth to chase the Oakland right-hander, who is in the worst slump of his career.

The A's fell to 2-5 on their homestand.

NOTES: Toronto has homered in 12 straight games. ... Melvin made his pitchers take fielding practice before the game. Oakland went into the night tied with Texas for most errors in the AL. ... The A's placed RHP Trystan Magnuson on the 15-day disabled list with tendinitis in his pitching shoulder and called up LHP Jordan Norberto from Triple-A Sacramento. ... Toronto optioned struggling starting pitcher Brad Mills to Triple-A Las Vegas two days after the left-hander's second consecutive rough outing. Since beating Baltimore on Aug. 5, he has allowed 12 earned runs in six innings. ... LHP Luis Perez, who earned the win in relief of Mills on Sunday, is scheduled take Mills' spot in the rotation and start Saturday at Oakland. ... The Blue Jays plan to call up right-hander Joel Carreno from double-A New Hampshire. ... LHP Brett Cecil (4-5) goes for his first win since July 29 when he pitches for the Blue Jays on Friday. Cecil took the loss against Oakland on Aug. 9 when he allowed three runs in seven innings. ... Canadian RHP Rich Harden (3-2), who beat the Blue Jays on Aug. 9, pitches for the A's.

SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE
Friday, August 19, 2011

BLUE JAYS, RICKY ROMERO SHUT DOWN OAKLAND A'S 7-0

Susan Slusser

Six weeks into the season, Trevor Cahill was tied for the major-league lead in wins.

Since then, the A's starter is the major-league leader in losses.

On Thursday, Cahill had yet another rickety outing, falling for the seventh time in his past eight decisions. His opposing number, Ricky Romero, recorded his third career shutout as Toronto breezed to a 7-0 win at the Coliseum. Oakland has been shut out a league-high 12 times.

The Blue Jays have won five of their past six and have scored 46 runs in those six games. Romero is on roll with a 0.89 ERA in his past five starts, all victories. He also is on a career-long roll against Oakland, with a 4-0 record and a 1.49 ERA in five starts.

Cahill started the year looking as if he might repeat his All-Star season of 2010; he won his first six decisions and put up a 1.72 ERA. Since then, he is 3-12 with a 5.30 ERA.

"It's frustrating, because I feel like I figure it out over a couple of starts and then go in a funk," Cahill said. "There's no consistency. I'll just try to improve and get some momentum over the next seven or eight starts for next year."

Cahill said he felt in the first inning as if he would have a good evening, and manager Bob Melvin said he thought Cahill was on his A-game, too. Cahill said that maybe he almost felt too good and was throwing too hard, leaving stuff up more, while Melvin thought he was having trouble with his release point. Catcher Kurt Suzuki said that Cahill's fastball moves so much, it's sometimes hard to control.

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"In my mind, he's still our No. 1 guy, with the kind of stuff he has," Suzuki said. "I'm really confident he's fine."

It was the middle innings Thursday that really bit Cahill, who allowed three runs in the fourth - two on Colby Rasmus' blast off the "Down to Business" sign in right. The Blue Jays got another in the fifth and two more in the sixth on a J.P. Arencibia single. Rasmus was a triple short of a cycle, and Brett Lawrie was on base three times; the rookie is batting .378.

Total damage to Cahill: 5 1/3 innings, nine hits and two walks, seven runs.

Oakland put two on with nobody out in the second, but Romero (12-9) struck out Conor Jackson and got groundouts from Suzuki and David DeJesus. The next inning, the A's had men at second and third with one out, but Coco Crisp grounded out to third and, after Josh Willingham walked to load the bases, Brandon Allen fouled out.

"A guy like Romero, you have to get him early, and we had some opportunities and didn't cash in," Melvin said. "Then he was on his way."

As anticipated, Allen remained in the lineup Thursday despite Jackson's return from neck stiffness. Jackson wound up in left field, with Hideki Matsui getting a game off and Willingham serving as designated hitter. Allen extended his hitting streak to five games, and he has a .529 average in that stretch; he also made an error in the fifth.

LOS ANGELES TIMES
THURSDAY, AUGUST 18, 2011

SLUMPING VERNON WELLS ON BENCH FOR THURSDAY NIGHT'S GAME

Mike DiGiovanna

The Angels are at a loss to explain Vernon Wells' dramatic decline since they acquired the veteran left fielder from the Toronto Blue Jays for Mike Napoli and Juan Rivera in January.

Wells, 32, was a career .280 hitter who averaged 25 home runs and 90 runs batted in over the previous 9 1/2 seasons. He is hitting .201 with 17 homers and 46 RBIs this season.

Though he's never been known for his patience, Wells averaged 45 walks a year before the trade. He has 15 walks this season, and he's so anxious at the plate he rarely gets to a three-ball count.

And just when you thought Wells couldn't get any worse, he's in a 22-game skid in which he has hit .126 (11 for 87) with one homer, five RBIs and three walks.

Not surprisingly, Wells is not in the lineup for Thursday night's series finale against the Texas Rangers, and Manager Mike Scioscia said he might consider giving Wells an extra day or two off. The Angels, seven games behind Texas in the American League West, are looking to avoid a four-game sweep at the hands of the Rangers.

"When you project performance, you're going on a past record, how a player's skills are and what you think he'll do on the field," Scioscia said. "You'll see a little fluctuation with guys, and it could be 15-20% at times. You might have that guy who drives in 100 runs have 80 RBIs the next year; a guy who hits .300 hits .260 one year.

"With Vernon, there are a number of areas where you're just scratching your head because it's so out of character for even what he's done in some of his lesser years. The bat speed is there. He just hasn't found the timing and rhythm to square balls up consistently outside of that four-week period where he was hot."