

Oakland A's lose fifth straight, see Conor Jackson traded

By Branson Wright, Oakland Tribune

A's manager Bob Melvin held a team meeting prior to Wednesday night's game to discuss a few housekeeping issues. He said the meeting was not entirely about any on field concerns, but it should have been.

Despite a lineup change and better pitching, the A's still couldn't shake off their habit of stranding runners. It cost them again in a 4-3 loss to the Cleveland Indians in 16 innings at Progressive Field.

Indians third baseman Jack Hannahan hit two solo homers and ended the game with an RBI single off reliever Josh Outman.

"There's nothing you can do about it now," Melvin said. "It's not like the guys didn't play hard. We had our opportunities. We had more than they did, and we just didn't cash them in, and that's disappointing."

The A's (60-76) lost their fifth straight game. They get a final crack at the Indians on Thursday minus Conor Jackson, who was traded to the Boston Red Sox for right-handed pitcher Jason Rice and cash.

The A's had 12 hits, the most since Friday's rally over the Red Sox. But hits haven't necessarily been the problem. Taking advantage of scoring opportunities is the issue. The A's stranded 13 runners for the game and 27 in the first three contests of this series.

The stranded runners became even more glaring because the A's bullpen had a stretch where it retired 24 consecutive Indians hitters.

"The bullpen was magnificent," Melvin said. "I don't know how you can ask for anything more where you can go out and potentially score one run, and we couldn't do it."

Melvin did make a small lineup change by resting center fielder Coco Crisp.

The A's tied it 1-1 in the second on a bases-loaded walk to Scott Sizemore. But Hannahan, a former Athletic, led off the bottom of the inning with a homer to center.

The A's Cliff Pennington doubled to lead off the third. He stole third with two outs and scored on Brandon Allen's single to tie it at 2-2.

The A's took the lead 3-2 on Kurt Suzuki's homer to left in the fourth.

Starter Rich Harden struggled in his last outing, giving up six runs in 4 1/3 innings against the New York Yankees. He got his groove back, at least for a stretch, where he retired 11 of 12 batters.

That all changed in the sixth when Hannahan tied it on a shot high off the right-field foul pole.

The A's threatened in the 10th, but Ryan Sweeney hit into a double play. The score remained tied until Hannahan drove in pinch runner Cord Phelps from second base in the 16th.

The A's recalled reliever Jerry Blevins from Triple-A Sacramento. It was the sixth time he's been called up this season. Blevins replaced reliever Brian Fuentes, who was put on the bereavement list. Blevins began his previous stint with the A's on Friday in Boston. He was sent down between games of Saturday's doubleheader. But instead of returning to Sacramento immediately, Blevins visited his parents in Toledo, Ohio. "It was much better traveling two hours by car to join the team than to have to fly across country," said Blevins, who took the red-eye from Sacramento to Boston last weekend.

Rice, 25, was 4-5 with a 3.69 ERA at Triple-A Pawtucket.

As promised, Melvin didn't start Crisp. Crisp did enter in the 10th as pinch runner and stayed in the game as designated hitter. In his past six games, Crisp was hitting .136 (3 for 22). "I was going to give him a day off in New York, and he went 4-for-4 that night, so I changed my mind," Melvin said. "He knew a couple of days ago that this was going to be the night."

Bill King, the A's popular announcer who died shortly after the 2005 season, is back on the ballot for voting to the broadcaster's wing of the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y. Fans have all of September to vote on the 2012 Ford C. Frick Award. Go to the Hall of Fame's Facebook site, www.facebook.com/baseballhall. The top three fan selections will appear on a final 10-name ballot. The winner, announced Dec. 6, will be selected by a 20-member electorate. There are 75 candidates on the online ballot, including A's announcer Ray Fosse.

Eight football players for the University of Miami must sit out games and repay benefits, the NCAA ruled Tuesday. The suspensions were a result of allegations made by former booster Nevin Shapiro, who claimed he gave gifts to players. A's second baseman Jemile Weeks, who attended Miami, said something must be done. "Guys like (Shapiro) are like vultures, by taking advantage of kids," Weeks said.

A's can't work out the bugs, fall in 16 innings

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland's long, trying road trip added bug infestation to the logbook Wednesday - to go with the earthquake and hurricane - in a game that spanned from Wednesday to Thursday and August to September.

Cleveland's famous midges made an annoying appearance in the game, in which the A's wasted chance after chance in the late going. Cleveland finally put an end to things in the 16th inning, when ex-A's infielder Jack Hannahan drove in pinch-runner Cord Phelps from second with a hit to right to beat Oakland 4-3 shortly after midnight. Hannahan had homered twice earlier in the evening.

The teams combined to use 14 pitchers, throw 509 pitches and strike out 34 times.

The only reliever to allow a run was Oakland long man Josh Outman, who gave up one-out singles to Jim Thome and Carlos Santana before Hannahan's single. David DeJesus' throw home was high and catcher Kurt Suzuki tried to come down with it and make a tag, but Phelps was immediately called safe.

"The replays were saying he was out," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "That's what I was told."

On the replay, Suzuki's swipe came before Phelps crossed the plate, leaving only the question of whether Suzuki actually got the tag on Phelps.

"I tagged him, yeah," Suzuki said. "I definitely did."

Oakland's relievers retired 24 in a row from the seventh inning through the 14th, striking out 10 in that stretch. Outman ended that roll by allowing a leadoff double to Jason Donald in the 15th, but with Donald at third after a flyout, Outman struck out Lou Marson and, after walking a batter, struck out Kosuke Fukudome.

"The bullpen was magnificent," Melvin said. "I don't know if you could ask for any more."

"I think they pretty much threw a complete-game shutout," Suzuki said. "We just couldn't manufacture anything offensively. ... We should have scored some runs."

The A's had men in scoring position in the ninth, 10th, 11th and 12th but went 0-for-7 with three strikeouts and a double-play ball.

"We had more opportunities than they did," Melvin said, "and that's frustrating."

Hannahan hadn't hit a homer since June 8 until facing the A's this week, and suddenly, he has added three to his season total, with one Tuesday night and two more Wednesday, both off Rich Harden and both with the bases empty.

Suzuki homered for Oakland, a solo shot in the fourth off Ubaldo Jimenez that gave the A's the lead - until Hannahan's second homer of the night tied it in the sixth inning. Oakland's first run Wednesday came on Scott Sizemore's bases-loaded walk in the second inning.

Harden had allowed six runs in his last outing, the A's 22-9 disaster of a loss at New York a week ago. On Wednesday, he gave up six hits and three runs in six innings. He walked two and struck out six.

The A's have lost five in a row and six of the past seven.

A's trade Conor Jackson to Red Sox

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

At 11:45 p.m. Eastern time Wednesday, **Conor Jackson** went from sitting on the bench for a team that is a season-high 16 games below .500 to the middle of the postseason race.

The A's traded Jackson, a former Cal player who was their first baseman much of the season until **Brandon Allen's** emergence, to the AL East-leading Red Sox along with cash. Oakland received right-handed reliever **Jason Rice**, 4-5 with four saves and a 3.69 ERA at Triple-A Pawtucket.

"It's awesome," Jackson said. "I don't think a guy in my position could ask for anything better - a big-market team with probably the best fans in baseball."

Bob Melvin, who also managed Jackson in Arizona, called the trade "bittersweet," because he's happy for Jackson but sorry to see a player he knows so well depart.

Melvin said he's unsure whether the team will be able to get another position player to Cleveland for today's day game. With rosters expanding today, the A's bigger need, if possible from a travel standpoint, would be for relief help after using the entire bullpen Wednesday.

Blevins back: Four days after his fifth demotion of the season, **Jerry Blevins** was back, because the A's put reliever **Brian Fuentes** on the bereavement list following his grandmother's death.

Blevins wasn't far away; he'd flown with the A's to Cleveland and then was given leave to spend a few days with his family in Toledo, Ohio.

"They called today about 20 minutes before I was going to leave for the airport," Blevins said.

Blevins pitched two perfect innings Wednesday and struck out three.

Briefly: Right-hander **Michael Wuertz**, out for the past month with right thumb soreness, threw a scoreless inning at Triple-A Sacramento, striking out two. He's likely to join the A's on Friday. ... With Cubs owner **Tom Ricketts** in San Francisco this week, and Chicago looking for a general manager, there was rumbling that perhaps he'd meet with A's GM **Billy Beane** while in town. A's owner **Lew Wolff** said no teams have called about Beane, but Wolff reiterated that he'd allow Beane to pursue other opportunities if they arise. Beane was unavailable for comment.

Leading off

Frick vote: Fan voting begins today to select three of the 10 finalists for the Ford C. Frick Award, given annually to a baseball broadcaster. The late Bill King and Ray Fosse represent the A's; voting is at www.facebook.com/baseballhall.

Drumbeat: Jerry Blevins is back for his sixth stint with A's this season

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Cleveland 8/31/2011 2:45pm

What a strange, strange season for lefty reliever Jerry Blevins. He goes up and down with such frequency, you'd think he'd feel sick. Blevins was sent out between games of a doubleheader Saturday, he flew with the team to Cleveland, and then was granted some extra time to visit his family in Toledo.

So when the A's placed Brian Fuentes on the bereavement list on Wednesday, Blevins was still nearby, and he headed for Cleveland instead of Triple-A Sacramento.

"It's been crazy," Blevins said of his day, and that also fits for his season, too.

Rosters expand today, so there's "a good chance" Blevins will stick with the team the rest of the way, according to manager Bob Melvin. Blevins hopes so, but, he said, "I don't want to jinx it."

Fuentes will miss a minimum of three days. He's drawn some criticism from fans this year for his poor start, but he's really been quite good since July 4, putting up a 1.59 ERA in 22 appearances.

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

If you missed it [in today's Chronicle](#), [Ryan Sweeney told me](#) he's been having a tough time mentally dealing with his lack of playing time and concurrent slump - sitting for several days after an 0-for-4 is wearing on him.

"My wife is ready to punch me in the face because I've started to question myself, like, 'Can I do this?' " he told me. "I'm not a player who sits on the bench a long time and does well. But what am I going to do? I'll just hang in there."

Balloting for the Frick award's ballot (*not* for the award itself, but to determine just three of the 10 names on the ballot that the Frick voters vote on) begins tomorrow at <http://www.facebook.com/baseballhall>. A's fans and fans of quality broadcasting might want to vote early and often for the late, great Bill King. Maybe if he gets enough votes for enough years, he won't be just one of the three extra names on the ballot - maybe the Frick committee will finally acknowledge one of baseball broadcasting's real treasures.

A's finish August with crushing walk-off loss

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

CLEVELAND -- The A's walked away from August on Wednesday without a winning record.

They haven't had one in a single month since July 2010.

August delivered several positives, no doubt. Josh Willingham went on a power tear, Kurt Suzuki and Cliff Pennington showcased life at the plate, and newcomer Brandon Allen offered a glimpse at what could be a dynamic future.

But the end was less than memorable.

Capped by Wednesday's 4-3 defeat to the Indians -- decided by Jack Hannahan's walk-off base hit against Josh Outman in the 16th inning -- the A's closed out the month with five straight losses, falling a season-low 16 games under .500 with 26 left to play.

Their latest beating came in the form of a stretched-out affair that lasted more than five hours, adding to an already tiring road trip that already included a four-plus hour, nine-inning game in New York and a doubleheader featuring more than five hours worth of rain delays in Boston.

Based on innings, Wednesday's contest represented the club's longest game since June 17, 2006 against the Dodgers (17 innings). And its end, which technically came in the month of September, came just under 12 hours before the start of Thursday's series finale.

"It stinks," manager Bob Melvin said. "Those types of games you'd certainly like to win."

Perhaps it would have been played longer given a different game-ending call. With pinch-runner Cord Phelps on second base and Carlos Santana manning first with one out in the 16th, Hannahan lined a ball to right fielder David DeJesus. The throw was on line to Suzuki, who reached for the tag on Phelps only to watch home plate umpire Bruce Dreckman call the runner safe.

Replays show that the tag attempt clearly came before Phelps reached home. The question, then, was whether the tag was actually made.

"I tagged him," Suzuki said. "I really didn't ask, though. [Dreckman] said something to me and walked off the field, so I really didn't get the chance to ask him. I tagged him, but I just don't know if he was on the plate or not. He hit my leg."

Said Phelps: "I was just trying to run hard. I knew it was going to be close -- just the way the catcher was setting up. I tried to get around him. Apparently I did."

No matter the case, the incident seemingly could have been avoided multiple times before the arrival of Outman. In his second inning of work, Outman allowed back-to-back singles to Jim Thome and Santana with one out, before Hannahan's game-changing hit.

The A's bullpen had combined for eight scoreless innings and 10 strikeouts -- retiring 24 straight from the seventh to the 14th inning before Jason Donald's leadoff double in the 15th -- and Oakland had its chances to reward those efforts more than once. But the club instead stranded nine baserunners without posting a run in those frames.

Overall, the A's tallied 15 of the combined 33 strikeouts between the two clubs and went 1-for-14 with runners in scoring position, leaving 13 men on base. And the bullpen was forced to use each of its arms.

"The bullpen pretty much threw a perfect game," Suzuki said. "It's too bad we couldn't manufacture anything to support them."

"There's nothing we can do about it now," Melvin said. "It's not like guys didn't play hard. We had our opportunities, there's no doubt about that. We had more than they did, and we didn't cash them in. So that's disappointing."

"The bullpen was magnificent. I don't know how you can ask for anything more, to keep you in the game where you could go out and potentially just score one run. And we just couldn't do it."

That same A's offense had appeared somewhat responsive in the early rounds after scoring just six runs combined over their previous four games. Never mind that their first run in the second against Indians righty Ubaldo Jimenez came courtesy of a bases-loaded walk. Two hard-hit balls off the bats of Willingham and Allen preceded the free pass.

And it was Allen's second hit of the night that erased what was a 2-1 Indians lead in the third, when he singled home Pennington. Suzuki gave the A's their first lead -- not just of the night, but their first since the second inning of Friday's game in Boston -- in the fourth, thanks to his 13th homer of the season, a solo shot to left off Jimenez.

But the lead lasted all of two innings, as Hannahan collected his second homer of the night off Oakland starter Rich Harden in the sixth, tying the game at 3.

It marked Hannahan's third home run in two days and the fourth that Harden has surrendered in his past two starts. The A's righty was lifted after the frame, having allowed three runs on six hits in six innings.

Also taxed by that time was Jimenez, whom the A's pushed out of the game after six innings, all the while forcing the hurler to throw 114 pitches. His line proved nearly identical to Harden's, aside from the home-run count.

In the end, though, Outman was the one left standing on the mound. Making his first appearance since Saturday's 77-pitch outing in the second game of the doubleheader in Boston, Outman said he knew coming into the game that he would be available, but as a "last-string" option.

"In the 16th inning, I don't think you can get more last-string than that," he said. "It's always disappointing when you lose ... After the way we battled, it would have been nice to have come out on the other side of the game."

Gio looks to get groove back against red-hot Tribe

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com

Oakland starter Gio Gonzalez had a memorable first half of the season, highlighted by an All-Star selection.

He'd probably rather forget what has taken place so far in the second half.

Gonzalez is 3-5 with a 5.44 ERA in eight starts since the All-Star break, after going 8-6 with a 2.47 ERA in 18 starts before the All-Star Game. The left-hander will look to improve that record when he takes the hill on Thursday against Fausto Carmona and the Indians.

Gonzalez is optimistic heading into Thursday's showdown, and here's why: He is 4-0 with a 0.89 ERA in five career starts against Cleveland. He also has momentum on his side. Gonzalez benefited from a healthy dose of offense in a 15-5 victory over the Red Sox on Friday, yielding four earned runs on seven hits and three walks while striking out five in 5 2/3 innings. He labored, tossing just 64 of his 105 pitches for strikes.

"[Boston] came in here hot," Gonzalez said. "They were swinging good, and the best I could do was hold them down a little bit. I give all the credit to the offense and the bullpen. I was just trying to minimize the damage as much as possible."

As for Carmona, he allowed six runs (five earned) in 6 1/3 innings, earning a no-decision in Saturday's 8-7 win against the Royals. He hadn't allowed five runs in a start since surrendering seven in a June 20 outing against the Rockies.

It's been quite a year for Cleveland and Carmona. Injuries have left Carmona and Justin Masterson as the only starters currently in the rotation who were in it at the start of the year.

Athletics: Sweeney fighting through adversity

Ryan Sweeney -- who had ten hits in 52 at-bats in August -- is expected to get a second straight start on Thursday, likely in a corner outfield spot.

An everyday player with the A's before this season, he's been relegated to a bench role in 2011. But manager Bob Melvin still believes that, given the right circumstances, Sweeney "does have the ability to be an everyday player."

"When you bring in Crisp, [Josh] Willingham, [Hideki] Matsui and [David] DeJesus, I think he knew going into the season that the role would be different for him this year," Melvin said. "The difficult part is you accept the fact that you're not an everyday player, and consider yourself a role player. But you still have aspirations to be an everyday player. That's difficult, so this has been a tough year for him."

Indians: Fukudome enjoying new surroundings

- Kosuke Fukudome has 13 RBIs in 33 games with the Indians this season. He had 13 RBIs in 87 games with the Cubs before he was traded to Cleveland.
- Jack Hannahan has hit safely in 12 of his last 14 games since Aug. 13. He's hitting .429 (21-for-49) during that span.

Worth noting

- The A's went 11-17 in August, their seventh consecutive month in which they didn't record a winning record.
- The Indians are one win shy of reaching last year's win total of 69.
- The game between the Indians and the Rangers on Sept. 14 will start at 7:05 p.m. ET and will be televised nationally on ESPN. The game will be blacked out in Cleveland, but can be seen locally on SportsTime Ohio.

A's ship Jackson to Boston for Minor Leaguer

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

CLEVELAND -- Less than 20 minutes before the deadline to acquire players for playoff rosters expired on Wednesday, the A's engaged in a last-minute deal with the Red Sox, sending Conor Jackson and cash to Boston in exchange for Minor League right-hander Jason Rice.

The move is a welcomed one for the 29-year-old Jackson, who plans to take his versatile abilities as a bench player over to a Red Sox team geared for the postseason.

"It's awesome," Jackson said following Oakland's 16-inning loss in Cleveland. "I don't think a guy in my position could ask for anything better, to go to a big-market team where there's probably the best fans in baseball.

"I'll probably have the same role, coming off the bench against lefties, but whatever it is I'll be grateful for it. I think the opportunity to play in October is unparalleled to anything else."

Jackson's role with the A's had quickly diminished in August, as a neck issue paved the way for the arrival of Brandon Allen, who has since assumed everyday first base duties once employed by Jackson. The outfield proved crowded, too, as manager Bob Melvin was having to shuffle Jackson in a right-field mix that already included David DeJesus and Ryan Sweeney.

The inconsistent playing time had an affect on Jackson, who left Oakland riding a career-long hitless streak spanning 21 at-bats.

"The fact that he gets to get the opportunity to go play in the pennant race in a place like that, I'm happy for him," said Melvin, who also managed Jackson in Arizona. "It's bittersweet, since I've managed him for several years. I've probably managed him longer than anyone else I've had, so in that respect it's disappointing. It's tough that he's gone, yet you have to be happy for him."

Jackson, who will be a free agent at season's end, is familiar with several members of the Red Sox, having worked out with Dustin Pedroia and Kevin Youkilis in previous winters. He was making \$3.32 million this year, and the cash included in the deal is likely to offset his remaining earnings.

Rice, originally an 11th-round Draft pick by the White Sox in 2005, was 4-5 with a 3.69 ERA and four saves in 44 appearances with Triple-A Pawtucket. The right-handed reliever has 89 strikeouts through 85 1/3 innings this season.

Blevins recalled, Fuentes on bereavement list

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

CLEVELAND -- Lefty Jerry Blevins joined the A's again on Wednesday for what he and the club hope will be the sixth and final time.

"You can't promise anything to anybody about that, but I would say there's a good chance," manager Bob Melvin said. "I'd like to see that. Things can transpire to where sometimes it just doesn't happen, but I think everybody would like to see that happen."

Blevins, who has gone back and forth between Triple-A and Oakland this season, was brought aboard for the team's third game in Cleveland to take the active roster spot of Brian Fuentes, who was placed on the bereavement list.

It is unclear when Fuentes will return to the team.

It marks Blevins' sixth stint of the year with the A's, who are likely inclined to keep him around for the final month as rosters will officially expand on Thursday.

The left-handed reliever has been called up twice already on the club's current 10-game road trip. He joined the club Friday in Boston and allowed one run on four hits, spanning a combined three innings in two appearances against the Red Sox. He was then sent down between games of a doubleheader on Saturday.

"You obviously want to reward a guy that's taken several bullets for the team," Melvin said. "There have been several times where he probably went out for a second inning thinking, 'I'm the length guy, and I'm going out with a move to make tomorrow, and I'm going to be the guy.' He's had to persevere through a tough season."

Blevins provided the A's with two perfect innings on Wednesday night, striking out three.

Fuentes, who has a 1.59 ERA over his past 22 appearances after posting a 5.09 ERA in his first 38, is eligible to be reinstated on Saturday.

Melvin believes in Sweeney's potential

CLEVELAND -- Coco Crisp received a scheduled day off on Wednesday, lending manager Bob Melvin the chance to play Ryan Sweeney, who could potentially start again on Thursday in one of the corner outfield spots.

"I was thinking about giving Coco a day off in New York, and then he went 4-for-4 that night, so he changed my mind," Melvin said, smiling.

But Crisp had collected just eight hits combined in the other 15 games he started after missing six contests with a strained right calf. He also hasn't stolen a base since the injury, but still ranks second in the American League with a career-high 37 for the season.

Sweeney entered Wednesday facing similar struggles, though his can be linked to inconsistent playing time. He came into Wednesday's contest with just 45 at-bats in the month of August, over which he tallied nine hits.

Still, Melvin believes that, given the right circumstances, Sweeney "does have the ability to be an everyday player."

"When you bring in Crisp, [Josh] Willingham, [Hideki] Matsui and [David] DeJesus, I think he knew going into the season that the role would be different for him this year," Melvin said. "The difficult part is you accept the fact that you're not an everyday player, and consider yourself a role player. But you still have aspirations to be an everyday player. That's difficult, so this has been a tough year for him."

A's lose in 16 innings, 4-3

ASSOCIATED PRESS

CLEVELAND — The replays showed the Oakland Athletics may have gotten a bad call.

That's the way it's gone this season.

Pinch-runner Cord Phelps was called safe on a close play at the plate in the 16th inning, sliding under Oakland catcher Kurt Suzuki's tag as the Cleveland Indians beat the Athletics 4-3 on Wednesday night, ending an August of losses for the A's, who dropped their fifth straight and went 11-17 in the month.

"Very disappointing," Oakland manager Bob Melvin said. "We had our opportunities and didn't capitalize. We had more than they did."

In the 16th, Jim Thome singled with one out off Josh Outman (3-4), the A's eighth pitcher. Phelps came in to run for the slow-footed Thome and Carlos Santana lined a single to center. Jack Hannahan, who hit two solo homers off Rich Harden, then grounded a sharp single to right.

Phelps was waved around by third-base coach Steve Smith and was able to reach past Suzuki, who had to jump to catch right fielder David DeJesus' strong throw.

"It was a close play, one of those things where you can't tell if he was safe," Suzuki said. "I tagged him. I know that. It's too bad to lose after we battled so hard. The bullpen basically pitched a perfect game, but we just couldn't get a key hit, either."

Oakland's relievers combined for eight perfect innings, retiring 24 in a row from the seventh until the 15th.

"Our bullpen was magnificent," Melvin said.

Frank Herrmann (4-0), Cleveland's sixth pitcher, worked four perfect innings as the Indians jumped Chicago into second place in the AL Central, 5 1/2 games behind Detroit.

The marathon featured a Progressive Field record 34 strikeouts — 19 by Oakland pitchers — and the two teams combined for 509 pitches.

The A's threatened in the 10th, 11th and 12th, but couldn't push the go-ahead run across. They stranded six runners in the three innings, leaving the bases loaded in the 12th against Chad Durbin, who got out of the one-out jam by striking out Ryan Sweeney and retiring DeJesus on a pop to short.

Suzuki homered for Oakland, which went 1 of 14 with runners in scoring position and stranded 13. The A's have dropped five straight and are 33-49 since May 30.

August was rough enough, and the A's will start September in a hurry. Oakland will have to avoid being swept in the four-game series, which will conclude with a noon game Thursday.

"It isn't easy, that's for sure," Suzuki said. "But we have to do it. That's our job. We should have scored more runs earlier tonight."

Hannahan's second homer off Harden, a towering shot off the foul pole in right, tied it 3-3 in the sixth.

He turned on an 0-1 pitch and drove it three-quarters of the way up the pole for the 3,000th homer at Progressive Field, which was also hosting its 1,400th game since opening in 1994.

Cleveland's Ubaldo Jimenez allowed three runs and six hits in six innings, and the right-hander got stronger as the game went on. He struck out six of the last seven A's he faced, freezing Suzuki on an outside pitch to end the sixth. It wasn't a dominant performance — he needed 114 pitches to get through six — but he kept the Indians close enough to pull out another one.

Harden, who was frequently mentioned in trade rumors involving the Indians before the July 31 deadline, posted an almost identical line to Jimenez — three runs and six hits in six innings with two walks and six strikeouts.

Suzuki connected for his 13th homer in the fourth, giving Oakland a 3-2 lead. The A's had tied it 2-2 in the third on Brandon Allen's two-out RBI single.

Notes: Following the game, the A's announced they traded 1B/OF Conor Jackson to Boston for minor league RHP Jason Rice. ... Of Suzuki's 13 homers, 12 have been solo shots. ... Harden made his 100th start for the A's, the 21st Oakland player to have that many. He's made 156 starts overall. ... It was Oakland's longest game since going 17 on June 17, 2006. ... A's bench coach Joel Skinner has been bumming a ride to the ballpark with Indians first-base coach Sandy Alomar. Skinner, who played, coached and managed the Indians, has maintained a home in the Cleveland area. ... A's OF Coco Crisp didn't start but came in as a pinch-runner in the 10th. Crisp went 0 for 2. ... The A's recalled LHP Jerry Blevins from Triple-A Sacramento for the sixth time this year. ... Oakland LHP Gio Gonzalez (11-11) will face RHP Fausto Carmona (6-12) in a noon start Thursday. Gonzalez is 4-0 with a 0.89 ERA in five career starts against Cleveland.

Cubs GM dial spins to Billy Beane after Ricketts trip spawns speculation

By GORDON WITTENMYER, Chicago Sun Times

SAN FRANCISCO — When Cubs chairman Tom Ricketts showed up at AT&T Park in San Francisco on Wednesday to watch the Cubs with some old friends in the stands, the buzz immediately rose about what new friends he might have made across the bay in Oakland this week.

Longtime Oakland Athletics general manager Billy Beane, rumored to be near the top of the Cubs' wish list in their GM search, wasn't on the road with his team in Cleveland and was presumed home in the Bay Area — along with well-regarded Beane assistant David Forst, another potential candidate.

Ricketts, who has made a vow of silence regarding his GM search, kept that vow Wednesday. But multiple high-ranking A's - officials suggested that no contact had been made.

That doesn't mean that at least some reconnaissance work wasn't accomplished on Ricketts' trip.

What it does mean is that every remaining game is about which GM candidate might be in the vicinity and about every Ricketts sighting in every place that isn't the Wrigley Field bleachers or owner's box.

On Wednesday, the Cubs lost a game (4-0 to the San Francisco Giants), won a series (2 games to 1 after getting swept in Milwaukee) and survived an injury scare to young star shortstop Starlin Castro (hamstring camp in the third inning; stayed in the game).

But when the final day for waiver trades passed without the Cubs making an August deal and when Ricketts showed up within a short limo ride of Beane — on a leg of the trip that Ricketts' second-year numbers man, Ari Kaplan, also joined ahead of the team — nothing else mattered. Nor will it for the final month of the season.

Not that it should. If the Cubs are going to make a regime change that matters, they're not only going to have to find the right person for the job, but they might have to be ready to get that hire done quickly when the season ends.

At least two other teams could be looking for new GMs by then, including the Houston Astros, who are said to have their sights on another Cub favorite, Tampa Bay GM Andrew Friedman, who's from Houston.

As for Beane, multiple reports suggest the star of the Moneyball book that's been made into a Brad Pitt movie due out this fall is one of several A's executives growing increasingly disillusioned with Oakland's attendance woes and bleak stadium and revenue outlook. He's a California guy, but some insiders believe he could be lured by the Cubs' challenge/opportunity.

When A's co-owner Lew Wolff told the San Francisco Chronicle on Wednesday that "no one has called" to seek permission to interview Beane, Wolff added, "But if they do, I certainly want him to be able to pursue any opportunity he'd like."

Meanwhile, in Boston, the Cubs' prototype GM model — Red Sox GM Theo Epstein — finally addressed, without coming close to resolving, rumors about the Cubs pursuing him and his possible interest in the job.

From the Boston Globe: "I try to avoid commenting on things that are so speculative," Epstein said. "We're trying to get to the postseason and win the World Series, and I spend all my time working with my staff to make this the organization we want it to be for now and in the future. That's where my exclusive focus is."

Pressed for an actual answer on the subject, he said, "Something like that, I can't even contemplate it long enough to comment on it. I'm all Red Sox all the time."

Cubs manager Mike Quade insists there are reasons to pay attention on the field this final month — whether it's Andrew Cashner's return from the disabled list in a few days, Castro's drive for 200 hits or Tyler Colvin's show-me-something finish.

"There's still a pretty bright future here with a lot of guys on this field, and I believe that," Quade said, "and that future can get bright through the month of September."

Which raises the most important question: Anybody seen Ricketts' itinerary for the Cubs' trip to New York next week, and does anyone know if Yankees GM Brian Cashman is planning to keep office hours in town that week?

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Donaldson blast keeps Sacramento rolling

By Alex Sadorf / Sacramento River Cats

Josh Donaldson's sixth-inning blast over the left-center field wall broke the tie and led the River Cats to a 4-3 victory over the Las Vegas 51s on Wednesday afternoon.

Donaldson's homer, his 17th of the season (second among active River Cats), helped give Sacramento its sixth win in a row overall.

"It was a fastball inside," Donaldson said of the home run pitch. "The entire at-bat (the ball) was going away. He went for the change-up after that. I was able to foul it up a little bit. I was actually hoping he would come in right there a little bit and he did. I got a good piece of wood on it."

In the first inning, Las Vegas took its first lead in this four-game series. The lead came off of an RBI double from right-fielder Adam Loewen to score shortstop Adeiny Hechavarria. The Cats prevented any more runs to hold the score at 1-0.

Right fielder Jai Miller put the River Cats right back in the game though with a solo home run to left field in the second. Miller currently leads the team in home runs and is second in the PCL with 31 this season.

Sacramento stayed strong in the second and put two more runs on the board. With Donaldson on second, Jermaine Mitchell brought his hitting streak to 17 games with an RBI double. Second baseman Wes Timmons followed with an infielder single to the second baseman that scored Mitchell from second. The Cats had taken a 3-1 lead.

Las Vegas closed the gap in the fourth, putting one run on the board off an RBI double from Ryan Shealy. The line drive to left field scored Loewen to make Sacramento's lead 3-2.

Las Vegas tied it up in the fifth off an unusual play. With runners on the corners and one out, Jayson Nix popped the ball in foul territory. Cats catcher Joel Galarraga made the catch while Darin Mastroianni took advantage of nobody covering home plate to tie the game, 3-3.

Sacramento pushed right back with Donaldson's homer in the sixth.

"We've got a bunch of winners on this team," Donaldson said. "We're just trying to go into playoffs with a good attitude and feeling good about ourselves. Keep winning. Keep it going."

On Thursday night, the River Cats host Fan Appreciation Night presented by Cache Creek Casino Resort (players and coaches greet fans at the gates prior to the game; in-game fan giveaways include round-trip airfare from Jet Blue).

RockHounds beat Missions 5-1 on the road

Staff Reports, Midland Reporter-Telegram

SAN ANTONIO -- Sonny Gray continued to live up to his draft status Wednesday, pitching five shutout innings as he combined with four Midland RockHounds relievers to pick up a 5-1 victory against the San Antonio Missions at Nelson Wolff Stadium.

Gray -- the Oakland A's first-round selection in the 2011 First-Year Player Draft -- is yet to give up a run in 16.1 innings of work as a RockHound. On Wednesday, he surrendered one hit and walked a single batter while striking out three.

Jonathan Ortiz then came in and pitched two perfect innings, recording three strikeouts in the process, and was followed by Trey Barham who delivered a shutout eighth inning. Jon Meloan finished the game and allowed the Missions their only run when Jeff Gyorko singled to score Daniel Robertson with two outs in the bottom of the ninth.

The RockHounds offense managed 13 hits Wednesday, but each of them were singles. There were no extra base hits delivered by either club.

Leading the way for Midland was catch Mitch Canham who was 3 of 3 with two RBI. Jeremy Barfield and Jason Christian also had two RBI a piece.

Perhaps the most impressive part of the RockHounds' performance at the plate was that it came against Missions starter Joseph Wieland. Wieland is considered one of the top pitchers in the San Diego Padres system after he was acquired from the Texas Rangers in a deal for Padres reliever Mike Adams earlier this season.

Midland pounded Wieland, who had a 1.71 ERA entering the game, for four runs on 10 hits and three walks.

Midland plays Game 3 of a four-game series with the Missions at 7:05 p.m. today at Wolff Stadium.

Ports Come From Behind in 5-2 Win

Stockton Ports

It may not have been quite the slugfest it was on Tuesday, but the Ports found away to get it done, beating the Modesto Nuts 5-2 on Wednesday night. Strong pitching and two solo shots helped propel the Ports to victory, pulling them to within 2.0 games of the Second Half lead.

Ports starter Rob Gilliam had a strong outing despite giving up both runs in the contest. Gilliam gave up the first run in the first, a solo home run off the bat of Nolan Arenado to right field.

The Ports evened it up in the bottom of the first. Conner Crumbliss, having just come off hitting his first career cycle, got things started with a walk and a stolen base. Anthony Aliotti drove in Crumbliss with a single to tie the game.

The Nuts got their final run in the third, another solo home run off Gilliam. With a full count, Josh Rutledge hit a home run to the Jackson Rancheria Back Porch in right. After the second home run of the evening, Gilliam settled into a groove, ultimately striking out nine Nuts batters in 6.0 innings of work.

The Ports tied it up in the fifth, taking Gilliam off the hook for the loss, as Leonardo Gil hit the first of two Ports solo shots of the night. Gil sent a 1-0 pitch from Nuts starter Dan Perkins to right field.

A solid defensive play in the sixth kept the Nuts from potentially recapturing the lead, as Arenado flew into a double play, popping out to Crumbliss in center, who alertly threw to first where Rutledge had not tagged up and was tagged out.

AJ Huttenlocker came on in the seventh and pitched an outstanding 2.0 innings of work. Huttenlocker struck out the side in the seventh, and retired all six batters faced in the outing to keep the Ports on top, and earning his fourth win of the season.

Huttenlocker's win was made possible by a three run seventh inning for the Ports. Mitch LeVier got the game winning run, hitting a solo shot to center field off Nuts reliever Cody Woods. Woods then walked Gil and Myrio Richard to bring up Crumbliss with two outs in the inning. Kurt Yacko replaced Woods, inheriting the two runners, and gave up back to back singles to Crumbliss and Michael Gilmartin to score the final two runs of the game.

Connor Hoehn came in to close the game in the ninth, and made quick work of the Nuts top of the lineup to earn his sixth save of the season. Hoehn gave up just one hit, a leadoff single before retiring the next three batters, getting the final out fielding a ground ball to first from a sitting position, sliding to stop a ground ball from Kiel Roling.

The Ports look to sweep the Nuts out of Stockton and pull to within one game of the Nuts in the second half standing with RHP AJ Griffin on the mound at 7:05 p.m. for the final home game of the 2011 schedule.

RockHounds' Gray earns first pro win

By Robert Emrich / Special to MLB.com

Sonny Gray seems to have a handle on the Texas League.

Gray allowed one hit over five shutout innings to earn his first professional win as Double-A Midland defeated San Antonio, 5-1, on Wednesday. He hasn't allowed a run over 16 1/3 innings.

The 18th overall pick by Oakland in June threw 37 of his 60 pitches for strikes, facing one over the minimum. He struggled in the second inning, walking Sawyer Carroll and surrendering a single to Vince Belnome with one out. But he induced a double play off the bat of Carlos Sosa to end the inning, something Gray called a "confidence builder."

Gray, who finished with three strikeouts, retired the side in order in the third, fourth and fifth, ending his night by fanning Sosa on five pitches.

"I had all three pitches working well," the Tennessee native said. "I was able to get a lot of quick outs with the fastball, was able to mix the breaking ball in when I needed to and even the change-up was really good."

After taking the loss in his only Arizona League start, the 21-year-old right-hander moved up to Double-A on Aug. 12. In four starts with Midland, the Vanderbilt product is holding Texas League batters to a .179 average. Gray tossed five innings in his last outing Aug. 26 against Corpus Christi, fanning a career-high six and not factoring into the decision.

"It's exciting," Gray said. "It's just something that a lot of people can't say that they've done and they never get this opportunity. It's really exciting."

Gray has one more start left in his season and is hoping to continue the progress he's made in transitioning from the college game to the pros.

"Getting more time on the mound is something that's important to me," he said. "Continuing to develop that change-up and pitching to wood bats, it's completely different throwing the ball, you can throw the ball inside more."

Jonathan Ortiz fanned three over two perfect innings of relief and Trey Barham allowed two hits in one frame. Jon Meloan allowed a run and struck out two in the ninth.

Mitch Canham was 3-for-3 with two RBIs and two walks while Jeremy Barfield plated a pair of runs for the RockHounds.

Joe Wieland (7-1) took his first Texas League loss, giving up four runs on 10 hits over five innings.

Snappers Salvage Finale

By Jon Versteeg, Burlington Bees

BELOIT, WI-The Beloit Snappers (27-33) recorded 18 strikeouts against the Burlington Bees (25-35) en route to a 6-3 win on Friday night at Pohlman Field.

DH Nate Roberts (1-3) hit a solo home run in the first inning against Burlington RHP Blake Hassebrock (7-8) for a 1-0 Beloit lead.

In the third inning 1B Andrew Leer (1-2) hit a two-run home run over the left field wall for a 3-0 lead.

The Bees scored a run in the fourth inning to make it a 3-1 lead. DH A.J. Kirby-Jones (1-4) singled and LF Douglas Landaeta (1-4) reached on a two-base error to push Kirby-Jones to third base. Kirby-Jones scored on a passed ball for a 3-1 lead.

The Snappers pushed across single runs in the fourth, fifth and eighth innings to earn a 6-1 lead.

The Burlington Bees scored two runs in the ninth inning. Landaeta and 3B Ryan Pineda (2-3) each singled and advanced to one base on a passed ball. CF Tyreece House (1-4) hit a two-run single to score both men for a 6-3 lead.

The Bees head to the Quad Cities to begin a four-game series with the River Bandits on Saturday at 7:00 p.m. RHP Jonathan Joseph (5-4, 5.58) gets the start for Burlington against LHP Ryan Copeland (4-3, 4.44) for Quad Cities. Pre-game coverage starts at 6:40 p.m. over Newsradio 1490 KBUR and online at www.gobees.com.

2011 Bees tickets are on sale now! To get single game tickets, or playoff tickets for game two of the first round of the Midwest League playoffs on September 8, please give the Bees a call at (319) 754-5705 (319) 754-5705 , go online to www.gobees.com, or stop by the box office at Community Field during normal business hours.

Late Yankee Rally Beats Vermont 3-2

By Paul Stanfield / Vermont Lake Monsters

STATEN ISLAND, NY --- The Staten Island Yankees scored two runs in the bottom of the seventh inning for a come-from-behind victory on Wednesday night to clinch the McNamara Division title with a 3-2 win over the Vermont Lake Monsters in New York-Penn League action at Richmond County Bank Ballpark.

The Yankees trailed 2-1 before tying the game in the seventh on a Tyler Austin one-out triple and Reymond Nunez RBI single off of reliever Nathan Kilcrease. Ali Castillo followed with a double to right field and Nunez was thrown out at the plate trying to score, but Vermont catcher Nick Rickles' throwing error trying to get Castillo advancing to third went into leftfield allowing Castillo to score with the unearned go ahead run.

Sean Jamieson was hit by a pitch to leadoff the eighth and advanced to second on a sacrifice bunt, but Rickles and Crocker struckout to end the threat. Chad Lewis had a two-out single in the ninth, but pinch hitter Dusty Robinson flied out to right to end the game and drop Vermont back to the .500 mark at 35-35.

Vermont had taken a 1-0 lead in the second on a pair of infield singles and a sacrifice fly from Lewis before the Yankees tied the game in the third on a bunt single, two walks and an infield single. Lake Monster starter Drew Granier got out of a further damage by striking out the next two hitters and a popout to end the inning.

Granier then struckout the side in the fourth and the first two batters of the fifth for seven strikeouts in an eight-batter stretch, but left the game after a hit batter and walk. He finished with one run on five hits with four walks and 10 strikeouts over 4 2/3 innings.

The Lake Monsters took a 2-1 lead in the fourth on a run without the benefit of a hit. Crocker and Chad Oberacker each walked to start the inning, moved up on a Jordan Tripp sacrifice bunt and scored on Lewis' second sacrifice fly of the night and league-leading seventh sac fly of the season.

Zachary Arneson tossed two scoreless innings of relief for the win and Branden Pinder two scoreless innings for his league-leading 14th save of the season for Staten Island (45-24), which clinched the McNamara Division as they lead Brooklyn by 4 1/2 games with four games remaining.

Vermont remains 1/2 game behind Connecticut (6-4 loss to Hudson Valley Wednesday) for first-place in the Stedler Division. Both the Lake Monsters and Tigers have a magic number of five to win the division with four days left in the season.

Vermont will look to salvage a win in the finale of the three-game series at Staten Island on Thursday before the Lake Monsters return to historic Centennial Field to close out the regular-season with a three game-series with Tri-City starting on Friday.