

Oakland A's end slide with 7-0 win over Cleveland Indians

By Branson Wright, Oakland Tribune

CLEVELAND -- Gio Gonzalez's dominant pitching against the Cleveland Indians was the cure the A's needed to turn around their recent plunge.

Gonzalez's strong start, combined with timely hitting by the A's, led to a 7-0 victory Thursday at Progressive Field, snapping a five-game losing streak.

After leaving 27 runners on base in the first three games of the series, the A's finally took advantage of their scoring opportunities. Oakland produced 12 hits, with shortstop Cliff Pennington leading the way by going 4 for 5 with three RBIs. It was the third four-hit game of his career.

But this game belonged to Gonzalez (12-11), who had seven strikeouts, allowed four hits and walked four in seven innings. He has shut out the Indians for 272/3 consecutive innings, and raised his record to 5-0 with an 0.72 ERA in six career starts against Cleveland.

"It's just great calling by the catchers," Gonzalez said. "Those guys did a great job. Our offense was there. It's definitely fun to go out there and watch these guys try to keep me in the game, and at the same time I do the same thing and try to keep them in the game.

"All I try to do is pound the strike zone. That's it."

Gonzalez worked out of three jams with two runners on base. On two occasions, he got Indians All-Star shortstop Asdrubal Cabrera to pop to right for the final out.

"Gio was tough on us again," Indians manager Manny Acta said. "He's got an overpowering fastball and one of the best breaking balls in the league. He always cruises against us, and he did it again."

Gonzalez gave up only two singles through the first five innings. But when Carlos Santana led off the Indians' sixth with a walk, Gonzalez called catcher Anthony Recker to the mound.

"I told him to let me get a quick breather and let's go back to work," Gonzalez said.

Gonzalez responded by getting out of the inning on three consecutive outs, including a strikeout.

A's manager Bob Melvin, who used eight pitchers in Wednesday's 16-inning loss, was thankful Gonzalez pitched deep into the game.

"That was big for us," Melvin said. "It was hot out there. It looked like he was tiring a little at the end, but we really needed him to give us seven."

Craig Breslow pitched the last two innings and allowed only one hit.

The A's broke a scoreless tie in the fifth inning when Pennington drove in a run with a single. Oakland then pressed the action with a double steal, and Coco Crisp's single to shallow right made it 2-0.

Recker led off the seventh with a shot down the third-base line for a double. Eric Sogard's bunt, which dropped in front of the plate, froze the Indians' infield and resulted in a single, putting runners at first and third. Two sacrifice flies, by Jemile Weeks and Hideki Matsui, made it 4-0.

The A's extended their lead with three runs in the eighth, as Pennington hit a two-run single and Crisp followed with an RBI single.

Discussing the A's 4-6 trip that included stops at Yankee Stadium and Boston in addition to the four games in Cleveland, Melvin said: "You always try to finish .500 on the road. The way we came out of New York and Boston, we felt like we had a chance to do it."

Pitcher Jason Rice, who was acquired by the A's in a trade with Boston, arrived at the ballpark in the early innings from Triple-A Pawtucket. The A's acquired Rice in a deal for outfielder/first baseman Conor Jackson. Rice said he can't believe he's in the majors.

"I'm in a dream right now," said Rice, 25, who is in his seventh season of pro ball. "I'm glad to be here. I'm blessed to be here. I'm ready to compete."

The Indians said 216 baseballs were used in Wednesday's game, which featured 14 pitchers, 34 strikeouts and 508 pitches.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Chin Music: Aftermath of the Conor Jackson trade

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 9/1/2011 12:13pm

Here's a quick take on the Conor Jackson trade ...

It was no shocker to see him dealt. The emergence of Brandon Allen had pushed Jackson into a minor role. But the bigger impact is the playing time this might open up for September call-ups. There's one less player now vying for playing time at first base/outfield. As I've written before, the rest of this season should be about evaluating young players who might be part of the future moving forward. Not just Allen and Jemile Weeks, but also a guy like Michael Taylor. I realize Taylor hasn't destroyed Triple-A pitching, but I'm surprised he hasn't gotten a look yet with the big club. There's a better opportunity to get him up here with Jackson out of the picture. Chris Carter? It's going to be trickier to find him playing time in the majors given how impressive Allen has been at first. Carter could get DH at-bats, but if the A's are entertaining any thoughts of re-signing Hideki Matsui (I've gotten no indication one way or another), they probably wouldn't want to take the veteran out of the lineup.

Bottom line, it's still unclear whether Taylor, 25, and Carter, 24, are factors for this team in 2012, and that's a problem. At this point, you need to give these guys extended playing time in the big leagues or assume they're not part of the plans moving forward.

—One last thought on the Jackson trade. It's tough to see him go from a beat writer's standpoint. He was definitely one of the team's best quotes, a guy who would give an intelligent take on whatever question you threw at him. The Red Sox press corps is in for a pleasant surprise ...

A's - short sleep, long offense

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

After a 16-inning game Wednesday night, shortstop Cliff Pennington joked that he might just sleep on the couch in the clubhouse. After all, the A's didn't get out of the ballpark until 12:55 a.m., and the bus back to the stadium was at 9 a.m.

"Road trip from hell," outfielder Ryan Sweeney said Thursday morning, yawning, hood pulled over his head and most of his face.

The sleepy A's did manage to put up runs Thursday, downing Cleveland 7-0 to finish a downer of a 4-6 road trip. Pennington had four hits and drove in three runs, and Coco Crisp had three hits and drove in two.

"We needed that one a lot," manager Bob Melvin said of the win, which snapped a five-game losing streak.

The A's played 33 hours, 50 minutes over the 10 games they were away from home, and they had four rain delays that added up to 5 hours, 29 minutes.

Asked Thursday morning if he was looking forward to getting this trip over with, Melvin had said, "That would be an understatement. ... But if we win today, that would salvage a bearable trip."

Gio Gonzalez going against Cleveland made that a good bet. He worked seven scoreless innings and now has a scoreless innings streak of 27 2/3 against the Indians, longest by an A's pitcher against Cleveland since Bob Welch's 28 from 1988 to 1990.

Overall, Gonzalez has won his past three starts after dropping five in a row.

Gonzalez said he was focusing on keeping the ball down. Melvin said Gonzalez's changeup was good and helped keep hitters from just guessing 50-50 on fastball or curveball.

Pennington pointed to Gonzalez's ability to get through seven innings, especially considering how thin the A's were in the bullpen.

"He was awesome. That was a huge step today, finishing that seventh inning," Pennington said.

Pennington hit .405 on the trip, and, Melvin said, "You add up the numbers and he had a lot of big hits."

Pennington made an error in the fourth inning, his 19th of the season, second most among AL shortstops. Oakland's 107 errors are second most in the majors and the most by an A's team since the 2003 club also made 107.

Oakland's swing to New York, Boston and Cleveland had its highlights - two wins at Yankee Stadium, in particular, and Brandon Allen's two spectacular homers there - but there were many more trying moments. Those included a 7-1 lead that New York obliterated in its 22-9 win, a doubleheader loss in Boston that included four rain delays, and Wednesday night's marathon, which was decided by a bad call by home-plate umpire Bruce Dreckman. Dreckman called Cord Phelps safe, ending the game in Cleveland's favor, though replays showed that catcher Kurt Suzuki had tagged him before he reached the plate.

"It did look like he got him and he was out," Melvin said before Thursday's game. "But there's nothing we can do about that now."

A's new reliever gets a quick call-up

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

There wasn't enough time between Wednesday's late finish and Thursday's noon start for the A's to get bullpen reinforcements from Triple-A Sacramento.

So the A's turned to a player they'd acquired just hours earlier, reliever **Jason Rice**, 25, acquired from Boston for **Conor Jackson** at 11:45 p.m. Eastern. Rice arrived in Pawtucket, R.I., by bus from Rochester, N.Y., at 5 a.m., and A's travel secretary **Mickey Morabito** got him straight onto a 7 a.m. flight from Providence to Cleveland. Rice landed right about game time and got to the stadium in the second inning.

"It was hectic," Rice said, beaming after being called up to the big leagues for the first time. "I still can't believe it. It feels like a dream right now."

Manager **Bob Melvin** decided against using Rice, even with a 7-0 lead, because he knew the right-hander had had no sleep.

Melvin said the bullpen was in better shape Thursday than might have been expected. The only reliever he considered entirely out of action was long man **Josh Outman**. **Craig Breslow**, who pitched two-thirds of an inning Wednesday, was the only reliever used Thursday, working two scoreless innings, striking out three and allowing one hit (off his posterior).

Melvin said that **Michael Wuertz** will rejoin the A's tonight after missing just more than a month with right thumb soreness.

September call-ups: It's unclear how many players the A's will call up this afternoon when they return to the Bay Area, but a third catcher, probably usual backup **Landon Powell**, is likely (he's batting .417 since being demoted Aug. 22), and with Jackson's departure, a first baseman/outfielder such as **Adam Rosales** would make sense.

With Sacramento set to open the playoffs Wednesday, the A's probably will not take many players initially. Outfielder **Michael Taylor** is a possibility at some point, along with starter **Graham Godfrey**, and it has been expected that reliever **Joey Devine** would return when he gets his stuff ironed out. **Chris Carter**, up twice this season, also might be back.

Leading off

Pests: The cloud of midges that appeared Wednesday evening "was bad," starter Rich Harden said. "They were swarming all over my face, in my ears, in my nose, in my mouth. I was looking for the sign and all I could see was insects."

Drumbeat: Rice en route as A's wrap up long, weird trip

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser in Cleveland 7:51am 9/1/2011

UPDATE at 9:25 a.m. Pacific: Jason Rice just arrived at the ballpark, and he was officially placed on the roster.

The A's obtained Jason Rice just before midnight Eastern last night, and after using all of their bullpen in the 16-inning loss here at Cleveland, it turned out that Rice was the only high-level minor-league player that Oakland could possibly get here in time for a noon game. Rice hopped a flight from Pawtucket, R.I., this morning, and he's expected to land at 11:40 a.m.

Manager Bob Melvin said if Rice doesn't make it close to on time, he might take his name off the lineup card - but really, there's little reason not to activate him. He doesn't need to be here for the game's start to be eligible, just listed on the card. The A's hope - especially after last night - they wouldn't need him until the later innings. Rosters expand today, and Conor Jackson's departure to Boston in the trade that netted Rice means there's a 40-man roster spot open, anyway. So even if he dashes into the park at 12:30 or 1 p.m., I'd imagine Jason Rice would be a part of the team at some point today.

If not, he is taking an usual route to Triple-A Sacramento - Pawtucket, Cleveland, Oakland, Sacramento.

We asked Melvin how much he knows about Rice. He said, "As much as you do." Which means, then, nothing beyond the basic stats. Rice didn't work yesterday but did throw 1 1/3 innings the day before.

Melvin said his bullpen is actually in better shape than might be expected after 16 innings. He said the only reliever he'd definitely rule out is Josh Outman, and he said Andrew Bailey would only be used in a save situation.

Melvin and the rest of the team very much would like Bailey to have a save situation. This trip has been brutal - very long games, unusual situations, painful losses, such as being up 7-1 at New York a week ago and losing 22-9, and then falling in 16 innings last night on a final play at the plate that was a bad call: Kurt Suzuki tagged Cord Phelps out, as replays shows. Melvin finally got a look at a replay and, he said, "It did look look like Zook got him and he was out. There's nothing we can do about that now."

I asked him if he'll be happy to get this trip over with, and he said, "That would be an understatement. There have been a lot of things going on. But a win today would salvage a bearable trip."

So here's the lineup to try to do that, with Gio Gonzalez on the mound: Weeks 2b, Pennington ss, Crisp cf, Matsui dh, Allen 1b, DeJesus rf, Sweeney lf, Recker c, Sogard 3b.

Gio dominates Tribe in finale for 12th win

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

CLEVELAND -- Salvage a "bearable trip." That was A's manager Bob Melvin's plan heading into Thursday's series finale at Progressive Field, which followed a 16-inning marathon that ended just 12 hours before and marked the culmination of an eventful 10-game road swing.

Thanks to a sturdy seven-inning effort from lefty Gio Gonzalez, along with more than enough run support, mission accomplished.

The A's exited Cleveland owners of a 7-0 victory, avoiding a potential four-game sweep at the hands of the Indians and concluding their journey on the other side of the country with a 4-6 mark.

"I would have liked one more [win] at some point, but based on losing five in a row, we needed that one," Melvin said. "It makes the flight a lot better. You always want to try to play .500 on the road, and the way we came out of New York and Boston, we felt like we had a chance to do it. Just came up one game short somewhere along the trip to play .500."

It was a voyage that spanned a total of 33 hours and 50 minutes of baseball, along with five hours and 29 minutes of rain delays courtesy of Hurricane Irene. So despite five more hours worth of air travel awaiting the team following the win, home never sounded better.

"Very excited," Cliff Pennington said.

Across the room from Pennington stood a satisfied Gonzalez, who struck out seven in the effort and gave up just four hits with four walks, stranding a total of seven on base while improving to 5-0 with a 0.72 ERA in six career starts against the Indians, who failed to move a runner past second base with the lefty on the mound.

The left-hander's seventh and final inning proved telling, as he escaped a jam with runners on first and second despite losing steam, which helped save a taxed bullpen that worked 10 innings on Wednesday.

"That was big for us today," Melvin said. "It looked like he was tiring a bit at the end, but we really needed him to give us seven. The last outs of the seventh were big."

"The whole time in my head, I was just thinking, 'I need to push it as far as I can,'" Gonzalez said.

The A's southpaw, whose scoreless streak against the Tribe now stands at 27 2/3 innings, was worked for 114 pitches on the day before reliever Craig Breslow was called upon for two scoreless frames to secure the shutout, the club's eighth of the season and third on the road.

"Gio's just focused again, locating and getting ahead," Melvin said. "With his stuff, it's key. He's throwing his changeup a bit more in off counts, another pitch the hitters have to think about. He's using it not only enough but in some key counts to get some outs with it."

At the plate, Pennington continued his strong second-half surge, collecting his third career four-hit game while also tallying three RBIs. The A's shortstop went 17-for-42 (.405) with 10 RBIs on the trip, which upped his season average to .272.

It was fitting, then, that Pennington was responsible for getting things going against Tribe righty Fausto Carmona in the fifth inning of a scoreless game. Pennington drove home the first of two runs in the frame, which also saw Coco Crisp notch an RBI single as the A's jumped ahead, 2-0.

"I'll tell you what," Melvin said. "You add up Cliff's numbers on this road trip, and he's had a lot of big hits. [He's] just another guy who has really raised his average here in the second half and taken on a leadership role here, as well."

The process, Pennington insisted, has been rather simple.

"Just trying to have good at-bats, swing at strikes," he said. "I'm seeing the ball well."

In the seventh, rookie Anthony Recker collected his first career double. After Eric Sogard reached on a base hit, Recker came around to score on Jerad Head's fielding error in left field on Jemile Weeks' shallow fly ball.

That marked the end for Carmona, who was charged with four runs -- three earned -- on eight hits with two walks and six strikeouts in six-plus innings.

But the A's weren't done for the day, as Hideki Matsui extended the club's lead to four in the same inning against lefty Nick Hagadone with a sacrifice fly. Oakland then posted a three-spot in the eighth -- highlighted by Pennington's two-run double and another RBI hit from Crisp.

Oakland's seven runs nearly matched the total of nine it had combined to score over its previous five games, all losses.

"It's fun to watch these guys go out there, trying to keep me in the game, and then me go out and do the same thing, keep them in the game," Gonzalez said.

The A's now return to their home turf to begin a six-game homestand against the Mariners and Royals, two clubs that will have to respond to reliever Grant Balfour's strong mantra.

"We're unbeatable in September, boys," the A's righty said, smiling.

A's broadcast legend King up for Frick Award

Revered announcer called Oakland games for 25 years

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

Deemed by one colleague as "the greatest sportscaster this country has ever produced," and by another as "the Tony Bennett of broadcasters," the late Bill King surely touched many as a treasured voice of the Bay Area.

"The depth of knowledge, the passion, the crisp description, the attention to detail, the command of language -- Bill was a master, like Mozart or a Rembrandt behind a microphone," said Ken Korach, the current voice of A's baseball.

Before King's passing at the age of 78, the revered voice broadcasted A's games for 25 seasons, beginning with the "Billy Ball" era, continuing with the "Bash Brothers" days -- which included three consecutive A's World Series appearances -- and concluding with the Big Three years that resulted in the infamous 20-game win streak and four straight playoff runs in the early 2000s.

King's work during those times, which promptly brought about several exclamations of his trademark phrase, "Holy Toledo," has earned him a nomination for the Ford C. Frick Award yet again.

Presented annually since 1978 for excellence in baseball broadcasting, the honor is given to an active or retired broadcaster with a minimum of 10 years of continuous Major League broadcast service.

With voting beginning Thursday for the award, King's supporters can now cast their online ballot for the on-air wizard at the **National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum's Facebook site** through the month of September.

There are 75 candidates listed on the ballot this year, as selected by the Hall of Fame, with two representing each big league team, along with 15 at-large selections. Ray Fosse, who is celebrating his 26th consecutive season as an A's TV and radio analyst, joins King on the ballot.

The top three fan selections from votes tallied at the Facebook site will appear on the final 10-name ballot, from which a 20-member electorate will select the winner, to be announced at the Winter Meetings in Dallas on Dec. 6.

"I've voted Bill No. 1 on every ballot I've had," said Lon Simmons, King's longtime broadcasting partner. "When you think of play-by-play, you have to think of Bill King as one of the best there ever was. He certainly has all of the qualifications."

Following his death, King won the online national voting process by landslide margins in both 2005 and '06, yet he was still not selected by the committee. Fans have until 2 p.m. PT on Sept. 30 to help King finally secure the deserving honor.

Road-weary A's return home for set with Mariners

By Spencer Fordin / MLB.com

Couch it any way you like, and you probably won't reach the full extent of the truth. The A's are more than eager to return home for Friday's game against the Mariners, a series opener that could help Oakland reverse a second-half slide characterized by substandard pitching.

The A's led the American League in ERA (3.13) before the All-Star break, but they've fallen to fourth over the last six weeks. Guillermo Moscoso will be matched against Seattle southpaw Jason Vargas on Friday, and Oakland manager Bob Melvin admits that it will be nice to be home.

"That's an understatement," he said of returning to play at the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum.

Oakland, 22-23 since the All-Star break, has posted a losing record in seven straight months dating back to July 2010. The A's, who are 26-46 on the road and 35-30 at home this year, will kick off the Seattle series having scored just 16 runs over their last six games.

Moscoso personifies Oakland's home-road splits, as the right-hander is 4-2 with a 2.81 ERA at home compared to a 2-6 with a 4.82 mark in 10 road starts. The 27-year-old shut Seattle out for seven innings in a start last month, and he's 3-4 with a 5.64 ERA since the break.

Vargas, meanwhile, has collapsed to a 1-6 record and a 7.13 ERA in his last nine starts. During that time, he's seen his season ERA rise by more than a full run to 4.52. Vargas is 0-2 against Oakland this season, and 2-3 with a 4.15 career ERA against the A's.

Though Vargas is struggling and he is closing in on a career high for innings pitched, he said fatigue hasn't been a factor.

"This year I feel a lot better than I did at this point last year," Vargas said. "I think it's just the second time through. It's just one of those things where your body learns and you learn as a pitcher. The goal is to keep getting better."

Seattle is 9-4 against Oakland this season, despite outscoring the A's by just five runs (45-40). That continues a recent trend that has seen the Mariners best Oakland in five of the last seven years. Seattle is 24-41 on the road this season, and 18-23 against AL West opponents.

Mariners: Carp comes alive in August

Mike Carp had a monster August, distinguishing himself among first-year players. Carp drove in 23 runs, establishing a franchise record for rookies while coming just two RBIs shy of the mark for any Mariner.

- Vargas said he is trying to pick his spots with his changeup, but he isn't shying away from the pitch.

"It's not that I'm trying to get away from it, it's just trying to get back to attacking the strike zone with my fastball and then using that to my advantage." he said.

A's: Bullpen gets reinforcements

Oakland's bullpen will get some relief on Friday, when veteran Michael Wuertz is expected to be activated from the disabled list. Wuertz has been sidelined by a sore right thumb, but he's made two Minor League rehab appearances and appears set to return to the active roster.

The A's will also add rookie Neil Wagner to their big league relief staff, joining fellow rookie Jason Rice. Rice, a former 11th-round draftee, was acquired from Boston on Wednesday night in a trade for Conor Jackson.

Worth noting

- The A's have been shut out three times in their last 13 games, and a league-high 14 times this year. Oakland has exceeded that total just twice (19 in 1978, 17 in '79) in franchise history.
- The A's are just 17-24 in one-run games, the worst record in the league and the most losses for Oakland in one-run games since 1987 (27).

Newly acquired Rice arrives to bolster 'pen

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

CLEVELAND -- Less than 24 hours after being acquired, reliever Jason Rice was placed on the A's lineup card for Thursday's series finale in Cleveland after the club was forced to utilize every arm of its bullpen in Wednesday's 16-inning loss.

Rice, acquired from the Red Sox in exchange for Conor Jackson, was coming from Pawtucket, R.I., home of Boston's Triple-A team, and was expected to land just 20 minutes before game time. After getting to Pawtucket around 5 a.m. from Rochester, N.Y., Rice was at the airport in Providence, R.I., by 7 a.m. and arrived at Progressive Field in the second inning.

At that point, the A's officially placed him on the active roster.

"Hectic," Rice said of his day. "We were coming back on a bus when I heard the news. I still don't believe it. I feel like I'm in a dream right now. I think it's going to be unreal until I can touch the rubber, but I'm glad to be here, blessed to be here. I want to go out and compete and just do what I've been doing."

Originally an 11th-round Draft pick by the White Sox in 2005, Rice was 4-5 with a 3.69 ERA and four saves in 44 appearances with Pawtucket, tallying 89 strikeouts through 85 1/3 innings.

Manager Bob Melvin thought Rice would be available, since his last appearance -- spanning 1 1/3 innings -- came two days ago. But the A's skipper also wanted Rice to get acclimated in the A's bullpen before throwing him into the fire, a plan that went through thanks to Craig Breslow's two scoreless innings of relief in Thursday's 7-0 win over the Indians.

The lone pitcher not available for Thursday's game was Josh Outman, who used 31 pitches while taking the loss Wednesday.

"You look at the innings, and it would suggest some guys wouldn't be available, but we did limit most of the guys and what they did," Melvin said. "You have some games like this over the course of the season, and guys have to step up and be available."

Should the A's have needed a pitcher after Outman, Melvin said he would have considered position players Cliff Pennington and Ryan Sweeney to take to the mound.

Wuertz on track to return Friday

CLEVELAND -- After logging another scoreless inning in his second Minor League rehab appearance, reliever Michael Wuertz is expected to be activated off the disabled list for Friday's series opener against the Mariners.

Wuertz, who has been out for the past month with right thumb soreness, struck out two in a perfect seventh inning for Triple-A Sacramento on Wednesday. The outing came just three days after the right-hander fanned three in a scoreless inning for Class A Stockton.

"Another pretty clean inning," manager Bob Melvin said. "Good chance we'll see him tomorrow."

Seemingly at full health, Wuertz will look to improve upon the 18.69 ERA he posted in six appearances following the break. He had compiled a 2.67 ERA before that time.

Worth noting

- Thursday's series finale in Cleveland marked the end to a long and eventful road trip, one that included several lengthy contests, rain delays and painful losses -- including Wednesday's 16-inning defeat, which was highlighted by a questionable call at the plate on the final play.

"I looked at it a few times from different angles," Melvin said Thursday morning. "Different angles show different things, but it did look like from the one angle over the top that he got him and he was out. Nothing we can do about that now."

Asked if he was ready to close out the 10-game road swing, Melvin smiled and replied, "That would be an understatement."

- Wednesday's 16-inning game was the 16th of 16 or more innings in Oakland history, as well as the longest since the club played a 17-inning game with the Dodgers on June 17, 2006.

A's end slide with 7-0 win over Indians

By TOM WITHERS, ASSOCIATED PRESS

CLEVELAND — Gio Gonzalez pitched seven shutout innings and baffled Cleveland again, and the Oakland Athletics avoided a four-game sweep with a 7-0 win Thursday over the Indians, who added another player to their overflowing disabled list.

Gonzalez (12-11) improved to 5-0 with a 0.72 ERA in six career starts against Cleveland. He hasn't given up a run to the Indians in 27 2-3 consecutive innings, and handed them a loss they can't afford. The left-hander allowed four singles and was never in trouble against a lineup missing several injured regulars.

Cliff Pennington had four hits and three RBIs as the A's did just enough against Fausto Carmona (6-13) and snapped a five-game losing streak.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Playoff-bound Sacramento sweeps Las Vegas

By Michael Morris / Sacramento River Cats

Michael Taylor hit a monster home run as Sacramento topped Las Vegas 7-1 before a sellout crowd Thursday night at Raley Field.

The win is the River Cats' seventh in a row, the longest win streak for the club this season.

"It's good to go out with a win for the final home game of the year," said Chris Carter, who went 3-for-5 with two doubles.

"It was fun. We had a good crowd tonight. Hopefully we can gain some momentum from this going into the playoffs."

River Cats players and coaches greeted the 14,014 fans who walked into the ballpark before the game and sent them home happy. The sellout was Raley Field's fifth of the season and 67th all time.

Taylor put Sacramento on the board first with a three-run home run in the third inning, his 16th of the season.

After Las Vegas scored its lone run in the fourth inning, the River Cats answered with three in the fifth. Carter hit his second double of the game before scoring on a wild pitch by Las Vegas starter Chad Beck. Soon after, Miller had a 10-pitch at-bat in which he eventually hit a sacrifice fly to right field to score Donaldson. A poor throw from right fielder Adam Loewen allowed Taylor to score for a 6-1 lead.

Sacramento starter Graham Godfrey allowed one run over 6.0 innings, matching the River Cats' single-season record for wins in a season. The right-hander has had Las Vegas' number this year, winning what is now the third game of four against the 51s. Godfrey's first start of the season came against Las Vegas, when he allowed seven hits and three runs in the no-decision. Godfrey allowed six hits and one run while striking out five in six innings Thursday night.

The River Cats are set to face Reno in the first round of the playoffs starting Wednesday on the road. Sacramento hosts games 3, 4 and 5 from Sept. 9-11. Godfrey has been even stronger against the Aces this year, winning both games and allowing just two runs against Reno.

Donaldson and Taylor each scored two runs while Mitchell scored the final run for Sacramento. While Mitchell was unable to extend his hit streak to 18 games, Timmons extended his to 12 with a single and double.

The River Cats now depart for their final regular season series at Colorado Springs. Sacramento is 11-1 against Colorado this season.

Wild Ending Sends Hounds To An Extra Inning Loss

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

Image # 1: The RockHounds take a 3-0 lead in the second inning, the first two runs coming on Jeremy Barfield's towering home run to left. Matt Sulentic then makes San Antonio pay for a 2-out error, driving in Jason Christian with a single.

Image # 2: With two on and two out, Barfield ends the San Antonio fifth with one of the year's finest catches, snaring a foul ball down the right field line off the bat of Jaff Decker. Barfield makes the catch while crashing into the 4-foot high, padded wall in front of the stands, reaching a row-and-a-half deep to make the play.

Image # 3: San Antonio chips into the 'Hounds lead in the sixth, scoring on a double, a walk and a passed ball.

Image # 4: The RockHounds turn an around-the-horn double play (Adam Heether-to-Christian-to-Michael Spina) to help deny a Missions rally in the eighth.

Image # 5: The 'Hounds lead, 3-1, entering the last of the ninth, with two on and one out, when a would-be double play ball is mishandled by Christian. Instead of "game over," San Antonio scores to make it 3-2.

Image # 6: The Missions then tie the game on two more passed balls.

Image # 7: San Antonio scores to win the game in the 12th on two walks, a single and a sacrifice fly. All of it comes against (designated hitter) Mitch Canham, who was forced into duty on the mound.

- The 'Hounds missed a chance to make it four wins in their last five games at Nelson Wolff Stadium in San Antonio, where the Missions are now 52-14. A win would also have guaranteed no worse than a .500 second half for the 'Hounds, who instead fall to 34-32 with four games to play.

- San Antonio scored twice on passed balls ... once on a fielder's choice (the play that might otherwise have been the game-ending double play) ... and a sacrifice fly.

- Starter Jason Bergmann pitched into the sixth, allowing just one (unearned) run.

SACRAMENTO BOUND - Two members of the RockHounds have been called up to (Triple-A) Sacramento this week. Pitcher Lenny DiNardo was called up after Tuesday's series opener, and third baseman Stephen Parker got the call Wednesday night. Thursday (September 1) was the first day Major League clubs were allowed to expand their rosters, so the "trickle up" process has begun.

Ports Drop Home Finale 5-3

Stockton Ports

Despite a dominant performance by starter AJ Griffin, the Stockton Ports dropped their final regular season home game 5-3 to the Modesto Nuts on Thursday. Two late home runs for the Nuts doomed the Ports, who held the lead heading into the eighth inning.

Ports starter AJ Griffin was a force to be reckoned with on Thursday, matching his season high strikeout with 10 against the Nuts, and keeping Modesto off the scoreboard until the sixth. At one point, Griffin had retired nine Nuts batters in a row.

The Ports got on the board first in the fourth. Michael Choice led off the inning with a single, before heading to third on an Anthony Aliotti single. Ryan Lipkin, who accounted for all three Ports RBIs drove in Choice with a single.

Griffin gave up his only two runs in the sixth, when the Nuts took their first lead of the game. Carlos Martinez singled to start the inning, and was advanced to second on a sac bunt by Scott Robinson. Martinez scored on a Josh Rutledge single. Rutledge was then driven in by Nolan Arenado, who leads all of professional baseball with 118 RBIs.

Griffin may have left the game with the Ports trailing with the potential to take, but thanks to a Lipkin home run in the bottom of the sixth, that would not remain the case. With Aliotti on first, courtesy of a walk from Nuts reliever Leuris Gomez, Lipkin drilled a home run to left field to give the Ports their second lead of the evening.

Sadly for the Ports, the bullpen was unable to hold down the win. Mike Benacka came in for the seventh and pitched one inning of scoreless relief before making way to Mike Hart. Hart gave up three runs in two innings of work, and earned a blown save and the loss.

Hart gave up the lead in the eighth when Arenado blasted a two-run homer in the eighth. Hart then gave up a solo home run to Martinez in the ninth inning.

The Ports close out the 2011 regular season on the road in Inland Empire. The four-game series gets underway tomorrow at 7:05 p.m. with Dan Straily taking the mound for Stockton.

Big Inning Leads to Burlington Win

By Jon Versteeg, Burlington Bees

BURLINGTON, IA - The Burlington Bees (29-36) scored six runs in the fourth inning to earn a 6-3 win over the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers (28-37) at Community Field on Thursday night.

LF Royce Consigli (1-4) led off the sixth inning with a single and moved to second base when DH Josh Whitaker (0-2) reached on a walk. Both men scored on a single by 1B A.J. Kirby-Jones (1-4) for a 2-0 lead.

RF Douglas Lanadaeta (1-4) followed with a single to move Kirby-Jones to third base. 3B Wade Kirkland (1-3) singled home Kirby-Jones for a 3-0 lead. C John Nester (1-2) followed with a two-run double. He moved to third base on a ground out by SS Yordy Cabrera (0-2) and CF Tyreece House (0-2) hit a sacrifice fly to score Nester for a 6-0 lead.

RHP Jonathan Joseph (6-4) pitched six innings and allowed two runs on five hits to earn the win. RHP Pedro Vidal pitched a scoreless ninth inning to earn his fifth save of the season.

The Bees and Timber Rattlers finish their series on Friday night at 6:30 p.m. Join the Bees in celebrating "Iowa and Iowa State Rivalry Night" at Community Field. Help the Bees kick off the college football season by wearing your favorite school's colors. The Bees will also host the final "Big Fun Friday" of the season with \$3.25 16-ounce cans of Bud Light and Busch Light. Because of scheduling conflicts on Newsradio 1490 KBUR, Bees baseball will be broadcast on Country Legends AM 1360 on Friday night. Wisconsin Timber Rattlers broadcaster Chris Mehring will be handling the play-by-play duties for Bees broadcaster Jon Versteeg, who will be away covering college football for the weekend. Pre-game coverage starts at 6:10 p.m. over Newsradio 1490 KBUR and online at www.gobees.com.

Vermont Wins 9-3 On Thursday

By Paul Stanfield / Vermont Lake Monsters

STATEN ISLAND, NY --- The Vermont Lake Monsters scored six runs in the top of the first inning, then added three insurance

runs in the ninth for a 9-3 victory over the Staten Island Yankees in New York-Penn League action Thursday night at Richmond County Bank Ballpark.

B.A. Vollmuth, Oakland's third-round pick in 2011 out of Southern Miss, went 3-for-4 with two runs, a double and two RBI in his first game with the Lake Monsters after being promoted earlier in the day from the Arizona League Athletics. Dusty Robinson, Jacob Tanis and Michael Fabiaschi all added two-run hits in the victory.

All six of Vermont's first-inning runs came with two outs, including a two-run double from Robinson, an RBI single from Vollmuth and a two-run single from Tanis for a 5-0 lead. Lake Monsters final run of the first came on a wild pitch scoring Jordan Tripp.

Yankee starter Matt Tracy allowed the six runs on four hits with two walks and a hit batter in the first, but then retired 10 of the next 13 Lake Monster batters by strikeout as Vermont had just two hits between the second and eighth innings. Meanwhile Staten Island scored single runs in fourth, fifth and sixth innings, including a pair of solo homers from Zach Wilson, to cut the Lake Monster lead to 6-3.

Staten Island got back-to-back singles in the top of the eighth, but reliever Jeff Urlaub got Wilson to ground into a double play and another groundout to end the Yankee threat. Vermont then scored three times in the top of ninth on a Vollmuth RBI single and Fabiaschi two-out, two-run double.

Vermont starter Brent Powers (4-2) allowed two runs (one earned) on five hits with two walks and four strikeouts over five innings for the win, while Tracy (1-2) took the loss for Staten Island (45-25). Robinson and Fabiaschi both had two hits for the Lake Monsters, while Reymond Nunez had two hits for the Yankees.

Vermont remains 1/2 game behind Connecticut (5-1 to Hudson Valley Thursday) for first-place in the Stedler Division. While the Tigers host Lowell in a four-game series (doubleheader Friday) over the weekend, the Lake Monsters host the Tri-City Valleycats at historic Centennial Field in a three-game series beginning at 7:05 pm on Friday.