



SEATTLE MARINERS NEWS CLIPS

September 3, 2011



Originally published Friday, September 2, 2011 at 10:27 PM

Relievers Kelley, Jimenez return in Mariners' loss

Starter Jason Vargas struggles in 9-2 loss to Oakland Athletics.

By Geoff Baker

Seattle Times staff reporter

OAKLAND — Another subpar outing by Jason Vargas enabled a couple of Mariners relief pitchers to get started on their personal comeback trails.

Shawn Kelley was the bigger name of the two, making his first appearance since June 15, 2010, after undergoing what has been described as "partial Tommy John" ligament transplant surgery on his elbow. But not to be outdone was Cesar Jimenez, mopping up the seventh inning of a 9-2 loss to the Oakland Athletics on Friday night with his first pitches for the Mariners since Sept. 29, 2008.

Jimenez missed most of the 2009 and 2010 seasons with shoulder injuries, and the only players left on the team from the last time he pitched are Felix Hernandez and Ichiro. Though he didn't look all that sharp, yielding a leadoff single, a walk, another single and a wild pitch that brought in a run before notching a strikeout, Jimenez said afterward it was a first step.

"I haven't pitched in three years," he said. "I was trying to throw strikes, but I wasn't getting the grip I needed to on the ball. The ball wasn't coming out of my hand the way I wanted. It's something to work on."

Nonetheless, Jimenez said it felt good to be back on a major-league mound after so many years away and the months spent working at the team's training facility in Peoria, Ariz., to get his arm strong again.

Jeff Gray replaced Jimenez with one out in the seventh and gave up a three-run homer to Cliff Pennington on the very first pitch he threw — with two of those runs tacked on to Jimenez's line.

Kelley had better results, allowing just a walk in working the sixth inning, but he, too, admitted to plenty of rust.

"I'm not real happy with the two-out walk and starting guys off with balls," Kelley said. "But it's a different thing than (Class) AAA. Some different emotions. It's just good to get through there and I feel pretty good about it. Now I can get to work now that it's over with."

The game was all but over by the time Kelley and Jimenez came on. Though it read just 5-2 on the scoreboard after five innings, the 14,972 fans at the Coliseum had watched A's starter Guillermo Moscoso kick into a groove that would result in him retiring the final 13 hitters he faced through the seventh inning.

Overall, the A's retired 19 of the last 20 Mariners hitters, with only Justin Smoak's second single of the night in the ninth inning snapping the streak at 17.

Moscoso is the pitcher who beat the Mariners 2-0 back on July 6 to get Seattle started on a franchise-record losing streak of 17 in a row.

The Mariners got to him early in this one, courtesy of Ichiro notching a leadoff single in the first, taking third on a fielding error, then scoring on a Franklin Gutierrez ground out. Casper Wells then doubled with a runner on in the second inning, and an infield hit by Brendan Ryan brought a second run home.

But Vargas gave it all back and more in the third inning, yielding four runs and running his pitch count up to the point where everyone knew he would be lucky to make it through five frames. Hideki Matsui delivered the big blow with a bases-clearing double to left-center, and Vargas once again was headed to defeat.

Vargas has won only one game since July 1.

He needed 115 pitches to make it through five innings, marking the sixth time in 10 outings since the All-Star break in which he has failed to go at least six frames. Before the break, he had gone at least six innings in 14 of 18 outings and had multiple starts of seven, eight and even nine innings in length.

"The fact of the matter is, I haven't been very good," Vargas said. "The season is winding down and I've got to figure it out pretty quick."

Vargas lamented the fact he continues to get beat by a handful of big pitches that lead to multiple runs. But he also agreed his command is not as sharp as it was earlier in the season.

At times, he says he's merely trying not to "give in" to hitters during longer at-bats when his pitch count gets run up. Other times, though, it seems he's being "too fine" with his pitches rather than attacking more aggressively.

Mariners manager Eric Wedge said it's often a fine line for command pitchers like Vargas, who can see their pitch counts grow when they just miss their spots. The problem with Vargas, he added, is that his problems seem to compound and snowball in a hurry when he starts missing by a little bit.

"He's still throwing the same number of pitches, he's just doing it in fewer innings," Wedge said, adding that he doesn't think fatigue is an issue. "I don't think it's a situation where he's not strong. I just don't think he's commanding the baseball."

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Originally published September 2, 2011 at 9:06 PM | Page modified September 2, 2011 at 10:57 PM

Healthy Justin Smoak happy to be playing | Mariners notebook

By Geoff Baker

Seattle Times staff reporter

OAKLAND, Calif. — Justin Smoak was merely happy to make it back to the Mariners in one piece.

After an injury-plagued month in Seattle — which included a hairline fracture of his cheekbone after getting struck by an errant ground-ball hop — Smoak headed out to Tacoma last week for a Class AAA rehabilitation assignment. In his very first at-bat, he was struck on the leg by a pitch.

"I was like, 'What's going on here?' " Smoak said.

He survived the stint and made it back to the Mariners, getting a single in his second at-bat Friday night as the team's designated hitter. Smoak wore a helmet with a protective flap that covered the left side of his face when he hit right-handed against Oakland starter Guillermo Moscoso.

After a difficult season both on and off the field following a fast April start, Smoak is looking forward to accomplishing some basics the final few weeks.

"Just trying to stick with the plan," he said. "I had a game plan early on and then I got out of it. I started trying to hit home runs. ... I just have to stay within myself and stick to the plan."

Notes

- Casper Wells snapped an 0-for-28 slump with a double to left field in the second inning.
- Ichiro entered Friday with the highest lifetime batting average at the Coliseum of any player at .365. He promptly added to that with a single to right field in the game's first at-bat.

For the record: W-L: 58-79 W PCT: .423 Streak: L2 Home: 34-37 Road: 24-42 AL West: 18-25 L.A.: 6-10 Oakland: 9-5 Texas: 3-10 AL East: 16-24 AL Cent: 15-21 NL: 9-9 LHP: 10-23 RHP: 48-56 Day: 16-24 Night: 42-55 One-run: 22-24 Extra inngs: 5-5

Next five

Saturday @ Oakland, 1:05 p.m. | Pineda (9-8, 3.71) vs. McCarthy (7-7, 3.64)

Sunday @ Oakland, 1:05 p.m, ROOT | Beavan (3-4, 4.11) vs. Cahill (9-13, 4.26)

Monday @ L.A. Angels, 6:05 p.m., ROOT | Vasquez (1-1, 11.57) vs. Haren (13-8, 3.16)

Tue. @ L.A. Angels, 7:05 p.m., ROOT | Hernandez (13-11, 3.27) vs. Santana (11-9, 3.27)

Wednesday @ L.A. Angels, 7:05 p.m., ROOT | Furbush (3-7, 4.97) vs. Weaver (15-7, 2.28)

Vargas can't turn corner in loss to A's

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com | 9/3/2011 1:10 AM ET

OAKLAND -- Mariners left-hander Jason Vargas had a 6-6 record, a 3.49 ERA and three complete games before the All-Star break.

Vargas appeared headed for a career year. But when the first half of the season ended, his nightmare began, and it continued on Friday night with a 9-2 loss to the Oakland A's. He allowed five runs -- four earned -- on six hits over five innings. He struck out four, but also walked four, hit a batter and threw 115 pitches.

The brilliant command that allowed Vargas to go deep in games during the first half has vanished.

"I think the story of the second half has shown that," Vargas said. "The fact of the matter is I haven't been very good. The season's kind of winding down, and I've got to figure it out here pretty quick."

Vargas fell to 7-13 overall and 1-7 in 10 starts since the break. He's 0-3 against the A's this season.

Vargas' latest loss had a familiar theme -- he gave up a big hit in a big inning.

Seattle took a 2-0 lead, scoring a run in the first and one in the second, but Vargas gave up four runs on five hits in the third inning, including Hideki Matsui's three-run double.

"The big inning has been killing me," Vargas said. "It's been killing the team. First pitch down and away. He put it in the gap and scored all three of them. That was enough for them."

After A's catcher Kurt Suzuki grounded a leadoff single to center in the third, Jemile Weeks lined a single to right and Coco Crisp blooped a single to center, loading the bases. Matsui then scorched an opposite-field double that went all the way to the left-center wall, clearing the bases. Matsui later scored on Brandon Allen's broken-bat, infield single, putting the A's ahead 4-2.

"When he's on his game, he seems to get better as the game goes along," A's manager Bob Melvin said of Vargas. "So that was a big hit for us. We were down and needed a big hit, and to score three runs and put us ahead, now you can relax a little bit and get better at-bats. That was the key to the game."

Vargas said Matsui beat him on a quality pitch.

"It was a cutter down and away," Vargas said. "Probably was trying to throw it more for a ball, but, I mean, a pretty good pitch. I wasn't looking for that to happen."

The A's added a run in the fifth when Scott Sizemore singled home Matsui, who had walked and moved to second when Vargas hit Josh Willingham. They added four in the seventh, three on Cliff Pennington's three-run home run off Mariners reliever Jeff Gray.

"I didn't feel like I was getting abused out there tonight," Vargas said. "It was kind of one swing that did it. Other than that the ball wasn't hit very hard. I've just got to be able to put away that guy in that situation, and I didn't do it."

Mariners manager Eric Wedge said Vargas was "working behind" in the count most of the game.

"It made it difficult for him. It just seems like the last couple outings it's been one pitch in a key situation allows them to really put a big inning together," Wedge said. "That's what we saw tonight with Matsui and that double there with the bases loaded. He was forced to throw a lot of pitches.

"I really wanted to try to give him every opportunity to get through things and work through this a little bit, because I know he's going to continue to get better. Obviously, he's a guy that we rely on and count on, but he's a command guy. He has to work ahead and stay ahead."

History doesn't give Vargas much hope for a late-season turnaround. He's now 0-9 lifetime in September and October appearances. Last year, Vargas was 0-5 with a 4.93 ERA in six September starts.

The Mariners jumped to a quick 1-0 lead in the first. Ichiro Suzuki ripped a leadoff single to right off A's starter Guillermo Moscoso and continued to third when the ball got past rookie right fielder Michael Taylor for an error. Franklin Gutierrez brought Ichiro home on a groundout to second.

Seattle made it 2-0 in the second with a two-out, none-on rally. Kyle Seager walked, then Casper Wells doubled him to third, ending a 0-for-30 skid. Brendan Ryan reached on an infield single that plated Seager.

After that, Moscoso cruised. He allowed just five hits and one earned run over seven innings, striking out six and walking just one while improving to 7-8.

"He was good," said Justin Smoak, who lined a single off Moscoso in the third and had two hits overall in his first game back from the disabled list. "He's got the sneaky fastball. It kind of gets on you. He threw his offspeed kind of where he wanted to tonight. It was just one of those things. He pitched a heck of a game."

Shawn Kelley, who was recalled from Triple-A Tacoma on Thursday, took over for Vargas in the sixth with the Mariners trailing 5-2 and pitched a scoreless inning.

Cesar Jimenez, another callup, took over in the seventh, but struggled. He gave up a leadoff single to Matsui, walked Willingham, then allowed a single to Sizemore that loaded the bases. With Allen at the plate, Matsui scored on a wild pitch. After Jimenez struck out Allen, he was lifted for Gray, who gave up a three-run home run to Pennington on his first pitch.

"We came out good," Wedge said of the 2-0 lead. "Ichi got us going. [Moscoso] did a good job against us tonight. He elevated his fastball when he wanted to. He was working down and away, even though he pitched inside well, both on the plate and off the plate. We were up there hacking. They weren't giving away at-bats. We just didn't have a lot to show for it."

Eric Gilmore is a contributor to MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

Smoak hoping to reverse fortunes in return

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com | 09/03/11 2:55 AM ET

OAKLAND -- Mariners first baseman Justin Smoak returned from the disabled list and went right into the lineup on Friday night against the A's.

Smoak only hopes that his luck has changed after three weeks away.

Smoak took a bad-hop grounder in the face on Aug. 12 against Boston, breaking his nose and sustaining a hairline fracture of his cheekbone. That was his first game back after missing seven games with an injured left thumb he sustained on Aug. 2 against Oakland.

This has been a crazy year for me personally," Smoak said prior to the game. "It's one of those things you have to keep battling through. There's reasons why things happen sometimes. You just got to look at the positives."

Smoak went 2-for-4 and struck out once. He lined a third-inning single off A's right-hander Guillermo Moscoso and grounded a single to right in the ninth off rookie Andrew Carignan.

"It was good just to get back in the swing of things," Smoak said. "To get back playing again is great. It will be better once I'm playing first. DHing on a cold night, it was tough. It was good to get back and hopefully we'll come out [Saturday] and get a win."

Smoak had high hopes the season, but has struggled. He's hitting .223 with 12 home runs and 44 RBIs after Friday's loss.

"I want him to get back into the groove and get that feel back offensively, get some reps underneath his belt," Mariners manager Eric Wedge said. "It's not really a numbers thing for me, but just for him to feel good about the way he finishes the season. We all know what he's capable of doing."

Smoak appeared in four games with Triple-A Tacoma on a rehab assignment. He went 0-for-11 with three walks and run scored.

"I hit a few balls hard," Smoak said. "It was just one of those things, I was trying to get my timing back. Everything's been good. I'm ready to get going here."

Smoak, who traveled to Oakland earlier on Friday, was in the lineup as the designated hitter and batted fifth. Wedge said it was just "nice" to write Smoak's name on his lineup card again.

"It's been a difficult month, month and a half for him injury-wise," Wedge said. "He played four games down there. I got him DHing [Friday] just because he played first base the last couple of nights and traveled today. So, we'll get him back out there after that."

Eric Gilmore is a contributor to MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

Seager in full swing during road games

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com | 09/03/11 2:55 AM ET

OAKLAND -- At the bottom of the first page of the Mariners' game notes on Friday, there was a "Did you know?" fact about rookie third baseman Kyle Seager.

Entering the series opener against the A's, Seager was batting .422 in road games since the All-Star break, the best mark in the American League for those with a minimum of 45 at-bats.

"I did not know that," Seager said before the opener of Seattle's six-game road trip.

Seager hit .600 on the Mariners' last road trip, a six-game, two-city stretch with stops at Tampa Bay and Cleveland. He went 15-for-25 and had at least one hit in every game. Against the Indians, Seager went 10-for-13 with five doubles and a home run.

"That wasn't a normal thing for sure," Seager said of the previous road trip. "That was a good trip. I was feeling comfortable in the box, seeing the ball well and everything, and trying to [make] good swings. Sometimes, balls just fall for you. It was one of those times where the ball was falling for me. It was a good road trip. It was a great road trip."

Seager is batting .351 on the road and .213 at home for the season, yet throughout his baseball career before this year he's never noticed "much of a difference" between his hitting at home and on the road.

"You pretty much try to stay consistent wherever you're playing," Seager said.

Seager walked and scored a run in the second inning of Friday night's 9-2 loss, but he went 0-for-3.

Worth noting

- Wily Mo Pena missed his second straight game to be with his wife, who is expecting a baby. Manager Eric Wedge said he expected Pena to return to the team sometime this weekend.

- Third baseman Chone Figgins (right hip flexor) worked out with a trainer before Friday night's game, but there's still no target date for his return from the disabled list. "I've got to see how he feels [Friday] after working out a little bit," Wedge said. "We brought him here with us so he could continue to keep working out. It's just really a day-by-day thing with regard to how he feels. We can't get him out there until he feels like he's ready." Wedge said sending Figgins on a rehab assignment to Triple-A Tacoma is "probably a long shot." Tacoma's season ends on Monday.

Eric Gilmore is a contributor to MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

Pineda looking for strong effort against A's

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com | 9/3/2011 2:15 AM ET

Seattle manager Eric Wedge doesn't need to be reminded how special Michael Pineda has been on the mound this season.

He just wants to make sure everyone remembers Pineda is in his first season in the big leagues.

"We wanted to make sure, not unlike any other young pitcher, that we made sure we kept a close eye on him," Wedge.

Fortunately for Wedge, Pineda, who takes the hill on Saturday against Brandon McCarthy and the A's, is unlike many young pitchers. Among American League rookie starters, the right-hander ranks first in innings pitched with 153, strikeouts with 156 and opponent average at .209, while ranking second with a 3.71 ERA and third with nine wins.

Pineda's 17 quality starts are the most by a Mariners rookie since Dave Fleming had 22 in 1992. Pineda goes on six days' rest and is scheduled to make just two more starts after Oakland.

"For me, I'm ready for more, but this is the plan. I like it," Pineda said. "My last couple starts were stronger. My arm is very strong now. I'm focused on finishing the season very strong. That's my plan for this year."

As for McCarthy, he is fresh off one of his best starts of the season, a 10-strikeout performance against the Indians that spanned eight innings and resulted in just two runs. The right-hander has upped his strikeouts of late, recording 19 in his last 21 2/3 innings.

Mariners: Rookies find hitting groove

Dustin Ackley, who is hitting .295, and Mike Carp, who is hitting .296, could become just the eighth pair of rookie teammates in the Major Leagues since 1950 to hit at least .300 for the season, and the first duo since Wilson Betemit and Jeff Francoeur accomplished the feat for Atlanta in 2005.

- Franklin Gutierrez went 0-for-4 on Friday and is batting .292 over his last 25 games, raising his season average from .194 to .224.

- Ackley went 1-for-4 on Friday and has recorded at least one hit in 50 of his last 66 games.

Athletics: Weeks keeps streaking along

- Jemile Weeks went 1-for-3 on Friday and is riding a career-high 10-game hitting streak.

- The A's will play 15 of their next 18 games in Oakland, a stretch that runs through Sept. 22.

- The A's have committed 108 errors this season, the most since 2003 when the club had 107.

Worth noting

- The Mariners are 9-5 against the A's this season. Seattle went 6-13 against Oakland last season, including a 4-6 record at home.

- Carp went 0-for-4 on Friday and is batting .349 with two doubles, one triple, four home runs and 15 RBIs against left-handed pitching this season.

He finished August with 25 RBIs, tying the rookie club record for a single month that Danny Tartabull set in July, 1986.

A's rough up Vargas in 9-2 win over Mariners

Published 11:35 p.m., Friday, September 2, 2011

The Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — Seattle Mariners pitcher Jason Vargas has about five starts left this season. If he's lucky, none of them will be against Oakland.

Then again, it really hasn't mattered much who the opponent is when the left-hander has been on the hill. The results always seem to be the same — a rocky outing ending with another loss.

Vargas barely made it through five innings Friday night in a 9-2 loss to Seattle — and it could have been worse. The Athletics batted around in the third inning but left five runners on base against Vargas while beating him for the third time this season.

"The big inning has been killing me, it's been killing the team," said Vargas, who walked four and had four strikeouts. "The fact of the matter is I haven't been very good. The season's kind of winding down and I gotta figure it out pretty quick."

Vargas (7-13) took the loss but he wasn't the only Mariners pitcher who got hit hard.

Cesar Jimenez allowed three runs in 1-3 of an inning, and Jeff Gray was tagged for a three-run home run by Cliff Pennington on his first pitch after replacing Jimenez in the seventh.

Just another frustrating night in a season that has been filled with them — both for the Mariners and their pitching.

"(Vargas) was behind most of the night and that made it difficult for him," Seattle manager Eric Wedge said. "It seems like the last couple of outings it's been one pitch in a key situation allows them to put a big inning together. That's what we saw tonight."

Hideki Matsui provided the big blow with a three-run double off Vargas in the third. Cliff Pennington also had three RBIs, while Brandon Allen and Scott Sizemore drove in runs for the A's, who won their second straight following a five-game losing streak.

It was the latest setback for Vargas, who has given up 22 earned runs over his last 21 2-3 innings. The lefty has won only once since going 6-6 before the All-Star break.

"I didn't feel like I was abused out there," Vargas said. "One pitch did it. I feel fine. I'm getting behind more than I'd like to, but more than anything it's just not being able to put the big inning away."

Guillermo Moscoso (7-8) snapped a two-game losing streak despite allowing his first earned run in 25 2-3 innings against AL West opponents. He improved to 5-2 with a 2.62 ERA at home this season.

Franklin Gutierrez and Brendan Ryan drove in runs for the Mariners, who lost for the sixth time in eight games.

Moscoso, who retired the final 16 batters he faced, completed seven innings, allowing two runs — one earned — and five hits. He walked one and struck out six. Moscoso went at least seven innings for just the second time in nine starts since the All-Star break.

The Mariners scored single runs in the first and second. Ichiro Suzuki led off with a single and reached third on Michael Taylor's fielding error. Gutierrez grounded out to plate Suzuki. Ryan added an RBI single in the second.

"We came out good," Wedge said. "We were in there hacking. They weren't giving away at-bats. We just didn't have a lot to show for it."

Matsui's three-run double in the third put the A's in front for good. Allen added a run-scoring single.

Sizemore had an RBI single in the fifth and Pennington's seventh home run in the seventh made it 9-2. Matsui scored on a wild pitch earlier in the inning.

NOTES: RHP Brandon McCarthy makes the start for the Athletics on Saturday. He is 6-2 with a 3.77 ERA in nine starts since the All-Star break. He is 1-4 career against the Mariners. ... Seattle OF Casper Wells snapped an 0-for-28 streak with a second-inning double. ... RHP Michael Pineda is Seattle's Saturday starter. He has 17 quality starts, the most by a Mariners' rookie since 1992. He leads all major league rookies with 156 strikeouts. Pineda is 2-0 in three starts against the A's.

Matsui, Pennington lead A's to 9-2 win.

Updated 11:31 p.m., Friday, September 2, 2011

The Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — Hideki Matsui plans to show up at the ballpark every day playing to win. His mindset remains the same in any situation.

Matsui and Cliff Pennington both drove in three runs to lead the Oakland Athletics to a 9-2 victory over the Seattle Mariners on Friday night.

"It doesn't matter whether the team is in a playoff race or not," Matsui said through his interpreter. "I'm going to prepare for every game and look for ways to help the team win. It's great to have the opportunities."

Brandon Allen and Scott Sizemore drove in runs for the A's, who won their second straight following a five-game losing streak.

Guillermo Moscoso (7-8) snapped a two-game losing streak despite allowing his first earned run in 25 2-3 innings against AL West opponents. He improved to 5-2 with a 2.62 ERA at home this season.

"He got better as the night went on," A's manager Bob Melvin said.

Franklin Gutierrez and Brendan Ryan drove in runs for the Mariners, who lost for the sixth time in eight games.

Jason Vargas (7-13) fell to 1-8 over his last 11 starts.

Moscoso, who retired the final 16 batters he faced, went seven innings, allowing two runs — one earned — and five hits. He walked one and struck out six. Moscoso went at least seven innings for just the second time in nine starts since the All-Star break.

"He did a good job against us," Seattle manager Eric Wedge said. "He elevated his fastball when he wanted to, he was down and in and he pitched inside well. We were in there hacking. They weren't giving away at-bats. We just didn't have a lot to show for it."

Vargas, who was 6-5 after throwing his third shutout of the season on July 1, lasted five innings. He allowed five runs and six hits, walking four and striking out four. Vargas has given up 22 earned runs over his last 21 2-3 innings.

"The big inning has been killing me, it's been killing the team," Vargas said. "The fact of the matter is I haven't been very good. The season's kind of winding down and I got to figure it out pretty quick."

The Mariners scored runs in the first and second. Ichiro Suzuki led off with a single and reached third on Michael Taylor's fielding error. Gutierrez grounded out to score Suzuki. Ryan added an RBI single in the second.

Matsui's three-run double in the third put the A's in front for good. Allen added a run-scoring single.

"That was the hit of the game," Melvin said of Matsui's bases-clearing double. "We were down, maybe we're pressing, and we needed a big hit. That gave us the lead and now we're able to out pitch better at-bats."

Sizemore had an RBI single in the fifth and Pennington's seventh home run in the seventh made it 9-2. Matsui scored on a wild pitch earlier in the inning.

NOTES: RHP Brandon McCarthy makes the start for the Athletics on Saturday. He is 6-2 with a 3.77 ERA in nine starts since the All-Star break. He is 1-4 career against the Mariners. ... A's IF Jemile Weeks extended his season-best hitting streak to 10 games with his third-inning single. ... Matsui's walk in the fifth ended a career-tying run of 16 consecutive games without a walk. ... Suzuki has a lifetime .363 batting average in Oakland, the highest in the park by any hitter. ... Seattle OF Casper Wells snapped an 0-for-28 streak with a second-inning double. ... RHP Michael Pineda is Seattle's Saturday starter. He has 17 quality starts, the most by a Mariners' rookie since 1992. He leads all major league rookies with 156 strikeouts. Pineda is 2-0 in three starts against the A's.

Dazzling Liddi can't lift Rainiers

LARRY LARUE; Staff writer

Published: 09/03/11 12:05 am

The Tacoma News Tribune

It began with a history lesson, as Tacoma third baseman Alex Liddi singled home a first-inning run Friday, making him just the second man in franchise history to score 100 runs and produce 100 RBI.

It was the only RBI by a Rainier all night, which was just fine with the Fresno Grizzlies, who hit, ran and pitched themselves to a lopsided 7-2 victory that left Tacoma three games below .500 with three to play in 2011.

After Liddi joined Craig Kusick from the 1973 season as the only members of the 100-100 club in Tacoma, it was the Fresno team that made history.

And they did it with their legs – stealing six bases to become the first Pacific Coast League team since 1988 to swipe more than 200 in a season.

For a pair of Tacoma outfielders, their minds may have been on baseball but it didn't appear their hearts were. Greg Halman walked and scored in the first inning, then struck out in his next three at-bats.

Carlos Peguero? The big man went 0-for-4 without putting a ball in play, striking out in each at-bat.

In fact, after Liddi's first inning single, Tacoma's lineup produced only two more hits – a Michael Saunders third-inning single and a ninth-inning base hit by Sean Kazmar.

The Grizzlies? They kept banging hits around all night, finishing with 13 and making lice hectic for Rainiers pitchers Chris Seddon and Chaz Roe.

Seddon ran into a little trouble protecting a 2-0 lead in the fourth inning, when with two outs he gave up a single and walked a batter. Batting ninth for Fresno, Jose Cuevas lined a ball toward left field, but shortstop Carlos Triunfel snared it on the fly diving to his left.

It was a marvelous save, but only in that inning. There wasn't enough defense to spare Seddon in the fifth.

The lefty gave up four runs and was eventually pulled by Brown at 101 pitches for reliever Chaz Roe, who got out of the fifth with a strikeout.

In the sixth, the Grizzlies were right back at it – three hits, a walk and an error for three runs and a 7-2 edge.

When it was over, Rainiers fans had seen Liddi continue one of the most productive seasons in team history, a year in which he's batted .256, scored 118 runs, collected 32 doubles, three triples, 28 home runs and 100 RBI.

Once the Tacoma season ends Monday, it's likely Liddi will be asked to join the Mariners in Los Angeles. Until then, he has three games to try to pad those numbers and help the Rainiers win a final series.

ON TAP

Tacoma hosts Fresno in a 7:05 p.m. game. Probable starting pitchers: Geno Espineli (2-5, 7.14) vs. Jarrett Grube (4-3, 5.00).

larry.larue@thenewstribune.com

Vargas a growing concern for Mariners

September 2, 2011, 11:50 pm

John Hickey

Comcast SportsNet NW.com

The rookies have given the Seattle Mariners plenty to be optimistic about heading into the final weeks of the 2011 season.

Some of the veterans, however, are a matter for some serious concern.

One of those is starting pitcher Jason Vargas. The veteran has a long history of pitching better in the first half of the season than in the second half, but as Friday's 9-2 loss in Oakland showed, the 2011 drop off is the worst year.

Vargas, 28, has been pitching in the big leagues since 2005, and he's been a fixture in the Seattle starting rotation since partway through the 2009 season, when he came back from hip surgery incurred when he was pitching for the Mets to get 14 starts for Seattle.

Throughout his big league career, Vargas has been better in the first half than in the second half.

For his career, Vargas's success is heavily slanted toward the first half of the season, going 16-16 with a 4.10 ERA before the All-Star break. But with Friday's 9-2 loss to the A's in the Coliseum, he is now 9-23 with a 5.40 ERA in post-All-Star break appearances.

The drop off was noticeable even last year, when he was 6-4 with a 3.09 ERA, then fell to 3-8 with a 4.66 ERA from that point on.

Vargas thought he might have finally gotten past all that in 2011, when he was 6-6 with a 3.91 ERA. His fourth, fifth and sixth wins were all complete game shutouts, and he was pitching with both command and confidence.

Both of those qualities are in the past. He's 1-7 since the break with a 7.13 ERA, by far the biggest drop off of his career.

Friday saw him staked to a 2-0 lead, but he had trouble throwing strikes, and in the third inning, A's DH Hideki Matsui crushed a base-loaded double that put the A's in front to stay. Vargas went on to pitch just five innings, and he needed 115 pitches to do that.

He's only pitched as many as seven innings twice in the second half; in the first half he was a monument to durability, pitching at least seven innings 10 times in his final 12 starts before the break.

Mariner pitching coach Carl Willis has tried to work with Vargas to iron out his control issues, but it hasn't taken, at least not yet.

Vargas doesn't have a power pitch, so he has to throw with control, hitting the corners and keeping the ball low. He hasn't been able to do that, as judged by the team-worst 21 homers he's allowed, although he didn't give up the long ball Friday.

"He worked behind (in the count) most of the night," manager Eric Wedge said. "In the last couple of outings it's been one pitch in a key situation that has allowed (opponents) to put a big inning together.

"That's what I saw with Matsui and the double."

It didn't help that Vargas had to throw as many pitches as he did.

"I wanted to give him every opportunity to pitch through things and work through this. I know he's going to continue to get better. Obviously, he is one of the guys we rely on and count on.

"But he's a command guy. He has to work ahead, stay ahead and when he does get ahead, he has to make pitches."

None of which happened Friday.

The Mariners, who were coming off a 2-5 homestand, got the jump on A's starter Guillermo Moscoso. Ichiro opened the game with a single, took third on an error and scored on Franklin Gutierrez's grounder to second.

Two outs in the second, Kyle Seager walked, Casper Wells ended an 0-for-28 slide with a double and Brendan Ryan beat out an infield hit. That made it 2-0, but the offense wasn't going to last.

Dustin Ackley and Justin Smoak, newly returned to the team after basically a month away thanks to injury, singled in the third. Moscoso and his bullpen retired the next 17 batters before Smoak singled one out into the ninth, by which time the game was long since decided.

September 2, 2011 at 10:01 PM

Mariners lack quality on the mound and at the plate, get walloped 9-2

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

For those of you watching football, you didn't miss a whole lot. Jason Vargas threw too many early pitches once again and needed 115 to get through five.

The M's went on to lose 9-2, with 19 of the final 20 batters being set down by Oakland pitching.

Justin Smoak notched his second single of the game in the ninth after the A's had retired 17 straight.

We got to see Shawn Kelley and Cesar Jimenez pitch the first big league games of their comeback attempts.

Kelley allowed just a walk in pitching through the sixth. Jimenez had more trouble, giving up a walk, two singles and a wild pitch and a run before recording his first out on a strikeout.

The M's took him out from there, but the very next pitch thrown by Jeff Gray was belted out of the park by Cliff Pennington for three more runs -- two charged to Jimenez.

Like I said, you didn't miss much.

Vargas pitched poorly after being spotted a 2-0 lead.

And the M's, after jumping on Guillermo Moscoso quickly, called it a night after that. Moscoso retired the final 13 batters he faced. Hopefully, it won't take another 16 consecutive losses this time for the M's to figure something out, unlike the last time they were owned by Moscoso. We'll see.

September 2, 2011 at 8:52 PM

Mariners at Oakland Athletics: Sept. 2, 2011 game thread

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

Jason Vargas walked a guy with one out, then hit another, then served up an RBI single to Scott Sizemore. The saving grace was that, with runners at the corners and one out, he got a strikeout and flyout to end the inning with no further damage.

But he needed 115 pitches to get out of the fifth and trails 5-2. Not a good night.

The A's are 49-22 when scoring four or more.

8:18 p.m.: If Jason Vargas was an Indonesian "train surfer" (they showed videos of those on the giant screen here between innings) he'd be splatted on a lamp-post right now. Vargas gave up a four-spot in the bottom of the third and now trails 4-2 with a pitch count up at 69.

He was his own worst enemy that inning, giving up three singles and then a bases-clearing double to left center by Hideki Matsui. With two out, he walked Scott Sizemore, then saw Miguel Olivo throw a ball away at second trying to pick the lead runner off.

That sent the runner to third and a broken bat dribbler up the third base line by Brandon Allen scored the fourth Oakland run.

8:00 p.m.: We're in the bottom of the third and the M's have a 2-0 lead. We saw Justin Smoak get a single in the top of the third to put two on, but the M's couldn't add to the lead. Nice to see Smoak come out strong.

Seattle scored again in the second inning after Kyle Seager walked. Casper Wells snapped an 0-for-28 slump with a double, then a run scored on an infield single by Brendan Ryan.

7:16 p.m.: The Mariners already managed something they weren't able to do against Guillermo Moscoso the entire game the last time they faced him -- score a run, albeit an unearned one. They all count. It helped that rookie right fielder Michael Taylor misplayed Ichiro's leadoff single into an additional two bases on an error. Franklin Gutierrez grounded out to the right side after that to bring in the run.

Mariners lead 1-0 after a half inning.

7:02 p.m.: Which Jason Vargas will we see tonight? The one who can dominate the Rangers in Texas? Or the guy who can't make it out of the fourth or fifth inning?

My guess is the former. After all, the M's are playing Oakland.

As for his mound opponent, it's Guillermo Moscoso. You know, the guy who beat Seattle 2-0 back on July 6? Launched that little 17-game losing streak? Yeah, him.

September 2, 2011 at 5:03 PM

Justin Smoak rejoins Mariners, will bat fifth tonight

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

Justin Smoak made it back into the lineup and will now have just under four weeks to salvage something from a difficult 2011 season. He'll be the DH tonight as he gets used to playing again, with Mike Carp still at first base.

Smoak was in good spirits down in the clubhouse today here in Oakland. He showed me the plastic flap that will cover the left side of his face when he bats right-handed. Just as he was showing me, he sneezed.

"Darn, I'm not supposed to do that," he said, noting that his face was still tender from the hairline fracture suffered when he took a ground ball off his cheek. "In fact, that's the first time I've really sneezed since it happened."

I confessed that I was wearing cologne, but...hey, it's the good stuff. Not the elevator-clearing fragrance sported by Miguel Olivo. But I digress.

Back to Smoak, he got hit in the leg by a pitch his very first at-bat in his Class AAA rehab assignment.

"I was like, 'What's going on here?'," Smoak said, shaking his head.

But he got through it OK. Is fine taking ground balls now, too.

"At Safeco, I was," he said. "But at Tacoma, I was a little uneasy. not the same surface."

He was laughing when he said it.

His keys for the final month?

"Just trying to stick with the plan," he said. "I had a game plan early on and then I got out of it. I started trying to hit home runs. I just felt real good there for a while and then started trying to do too much.

"I just have to stay within myself and stick to the plan."

The lineups:

Mariners (58-78)

51 Ichiro Suzuki (L) RF
21 Franklin Gutierrez CF
13 Dustin Ackley (L) 2B
20 Mike Carp (L) 1B
17 Justin Smoak (S) DH
30 Miguel Olivo C
15 Kyle Seager (L) 3B
33 Casper Wells LF
26 Brendan Ryan SS

38 Jason Vargas LHP

Athletics (61-76)

19 Jemile Weeks (S) 2B
4 Coco Crisp (S) CF
55 Hideki Matsui (L) DH
16 Josh Willingham LF
29 Scott Sizemore 3B
31 Brandon Allen (L) 1B
2 Cliff Pennington (S) SS
8 Kurt Suzuki C
23 Michael Taylor RF

52 Guillermo Moscoso RHP

September 2, 2011 at 12:08 PM

Pitching now a bigger struggle for Mariners than hitting

Posted by Larry Stone
Seattle Times Blog

It's kind of been taken for granted by Mariners' fans that their woes are centered around offense. Figure out a way to score runs, and the wins would follow.

I don't need to go back over the woeful history of the Mariners' offensive troubles last year, and how for much of this season, it looked they were headed for numbers that were every bit as bad. And yet, on the strength of their stalwart pitching, the Mariners still stood at .500 (43-43) as late as July 5, when they were just 2 1/2 games out of first place. That surprising run of contention was built around the fact that the Mariners could count on a well-pitched game virtually every night out from their starting rotation of Felix Hernandez, Michael Pineda, Doug Fister, Erik Bedard and Jason Vargas.

Something kind of interesting has happened since then, however. The Mariners' pitching began to struggle in July, which coupled with an absolutely miserable offensive month (72 runs and a .574 OPS in 26 games) led to a 17-game losing streak and a 6-20 record.

The hitting, meanwhile, perked up considerably in August, but the pitching didn't. The Mariners, dead last in the American League in most offensive categories all year, including scoring, actually entered the realm of respectability. After scoring 84 runs in May, 84 in June and, as mentioned, 72 in July, they shot up to 121 runs in August. And their August OPS was over .700 for the first time all year at .736. It's not exactly the 1927 Yankees, but at least it doesn't have to be prefaced by the phrase "historically bad," as had been the case.

That improvement was accomplished largely through an infusion of rookies, most notably Dustin Ackley, Mike Carp and Kyle Seager, with contributions from Casper Wells and Trayvon Robinson before recent struggles.

The pitching decline, meanwhile, has come as the staff got younger as well after the trades of Bedard and Fister. But the fade, as mentioned, started earlier than that. The Mariners got sensational pitching in both May and June, ranking first in the AL in both months with ERAs of 2.98 and 2.82. But in July, their team ERA shot up to 4.66 (13th in the AL) and rose even more in August to 4.85 (12th in the AL).

Obviously, we've seen the replacements for Fister and Bedard have their ups and downs. Charlie Furbush, Blake Beavan and Anthony Vasquez have combined to make 14 starts since Aug. 1, with a cumulative 6.20 ERA. Michael Pineda seemed to hit the wall in July, putting up a 6.75 ERA in the month, followed by 4.70 in August -- this after putting up stellar months of 2.01 (April), 2.81 (May) and 3.03 (June). Vargas, after a strong first half, has struggled mightily the past two months. He had a 5.09 ERA in July and 6.07 in August, going a combined 2-7. Bedard, one of the best pitchers in baseball in May and June, was injured throughout July and made only one start. Only Felix Hernandez remained consistent in July and August. His ERAs by month are 3.32 (April), 3.07 (May), 3.65 (June), 3.50 (July), and 2.84 (August), with a complete-game win to start September.

As the starters struggled, the number of innings required by the bullpen rose, and so did their ERA. Here are the month-by-month numbers of Mariners starters and relievers, with the team's record in parentheses:

April (13-15)

Starters: 28 games, 169 innings, 3.78 ERA

Relievers: 26 games, 75 innings, 4.32 ERA

May (15-11)

Starters: 26 games, 175 1/3 innings, 2.93 ERA

Relievers: 25 games, 67 innings, 2.55 ERA

June (11-16)

Starters: 27 games, 191 1/3 innings, 3.01 ERA

Relievers: 24 games, 47 innings, 2.87 ERA

July (6-20)

Starters: 26 games, 163 innings, 4.64 ERA

Relievers: 23 games: 64 2/3 innings, 4.73 ERA

August (13-15)

Starters: 28 games, 169 1/3 innings, 5.10 ERA

Relievers: 25 games, 75 2/3 innings, 4.28 ERA

Note that the Mariners have been using four rookies out of the bullpen -- Tom Wilhelmsen, Josh Lueke, Dan Cortes and Chance Ruffin, with predictably mixed results.

As is the case with the offense, the Mariners are using the final half of this season to try to evaluate young players and decide whether or not they are keepers. With Fister and Bedard gone, Vargas fading and Pineda under increasingly tight wraps, it's far from the stable and productive rotation we saw in the first half. The bullpen, too, is more erratic than it was in the first half when David Pauley (also gone) and Jamey Wright were extremely effective in setup roles. Wilhelmsen has emerged, but the other youngsters have been up and down.

The Mariners can still count on a solidly pitched game whenever Felix Hernandez takes the mound. But for the past two months, not much else has been guaranteed.

September 2, 2011 at 11:24 AM

Understanding the concept of power hitting and positions

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

Listening to a radio show yesterday, it occurred to me that plenty of folks out there tend to misunderstand the concept of getting power hitters at certain positions on the diamond. One of the on-air personalities said something along the lines of "I don't buy into the concept that you have to have a power hitter at third base."

Fair enough. Probably because that isn't really a concept. And the people who think it is tend to misunderstand the whole debate. They even misunderstand it to the point where they start to get belligerent about it. I had an exchange with a reader later on in the evening who completely misses the point of power hitting, positions and Kyle Seager of the Mariners. We've discussed Seager before and the fact that he doesn't project to be a typical power hitter, regardless of how well the past few weeks have gone for him.

And I can't tell you how many readers have written in arguing that there is no rule that says you have to get a power hitter to play third. Again, no argument from me. I agree. There is no such rule. No rule that says a power guy has to play right field, or first base, or DH either. And I don't know of too many people working in baseball who would ever try to make that argument. Because that isn't what the whole power and positions discussion is about.

So, if anyone is confused about it, I'll try to explain it quickly and concisely.

You need a certain amount of extra base power on every team. Why? Because if you stack a lineup full of singles hitters, you need to rely on every one of them to hit .300 and not be exposed to prolonged slumps at any given time. Because one home run swing can often do what four or five singles and walks cannot.

Teams have tried to buck that trend, including the Mariners. The results haven't been pretty. Every good team tends to have middle of the order hitters that other teams fear. It changes the way lineups are pitched to. In a perfect world, you'd like to have power sprinkled up and down the order. Not always home run power, but extra-base ability in the form of doubles. That's why we look at on-base-plus-slugging percentage (OPS) a lot here, rather than simply home run totals. Used to be, the good teams would stack up a bunch of .900 or better OPS types. Now, with the Steroids Era having calmed down a bit, the definition of good power has dropped to anyone with an OPS of .800 or more.

But you need a good dose of such players to have a moderately successful offense.

Doesn't matter whether they play third base, right field, second base or catcher. Heck, let the pitcher hit if he has a better OPS than your DH. Nobody will try to stop you.

But the facts of baseball life are: you have fewer middle infielders who can hit for power (and pitchers) than you do corner infielders and outfielders who can do it. Why? Because the guys needed to play the more athletically demanding positions up the middle tend to have sleeker bodies less given to power. There are always exceptions, like Alex Rodriguez when he played shortstop. But they are exceptions, not the rule.

And so, the entire position and power thing is not an argument about labels on where power hitters have to play. It's really just a basic numbers argument.

If a team knows it needs a certain amount of power hitters to be moderately successful, you start looking for them where they are easiest to get -- in the corners. The whole law of supply and demand. There are a ton of potential DH types out there because baseball is full of guys who can hit but can't play a position very well. There's a surplus.

That's why the folks around baseball tend to say that DH is the easiest spot to fill. (Unless you're the Mariners, but that's another story).

The hardest spot to fill with a power hitter? Second base, shortstop, catcher and center field. There just aren't enough guys at those skill positions on the diamond who can also hit for power. The ones who can do both come at a premium, which is why you've seen huge contracts given to guys like A-Rod, Torii Hunter, Vernon Wells and others. It's why the M's jumped all over extending Franklin Gutierrez, realizing that if his bat hit for even a touch of power, they'd have a very valuable commodity on their hands at a low price.

It's why Dustin Ackley is more valuable to the team at second base than in left field. There are, in general, more left fielders out there who can hit for power than there are second basemen.

Now, clearly, if a team can corner the market on guys at typical non-power spots who actually can hit for power, well then, you've got a real lethal offense in the making. For instance, a team that has a power-hitting second baseman and catcher already can then go out and get the typical corner infield and outfield power guys from the baseball-wide surplus and stack the lineup with extra-base hitters up and down.

Got your Dustin Pedroia up the middle? Your Jacoby Ellsbury in center? Great, then throw them in a lineup with Kevin Youkellis and Adrian Gonzalez in the infield corners and David Ortiz at DH and watch what happens. All of a sudden, you've got one of the best offenses in the game and are a World Series contender.

So, back to the Mariners.

They have lacked power for years, as we all know.

And part of the problem is, the Mariners have been unable to field a team with power guys even at the easier-found positions.

One huge obstacle is that Ichiro is the right fielder. That eliminates power at one of the more easily-found spots. The M's also cannot, for the life of them, find a suitable DH. So, the team has had to compensate by looking for power in the harder-to-find spots.

Unfortunately, they haven't really had that either.

Instead, they compounded the problem by inking Chone Figgins long-term to play third base and he also lacks power. Left field remains a huge question mark.

So, with five power spots running on empty for years, the M's would have to find added power at a bunch of non-traditional spots just to keep up with the average teams in baseball. Never mind the good offensive teams.

So far, they've yet to find it on a large scale.

Gutierrez has not demonstrated power in center. Brendan Ryan certainly doesn't bring it to the table at shortstop.

Miguel Olivo brings home run power at catcher, but a lot of that is negated by his very low on-base-percentage when he isn't hitting the ball out.

The one exception is Ackley, who is looking like a solid middle of the order hitter and again, doing it while playing an infield skill position.

But unfortunately, he's one guy. And he alone doesn't make up for all the other gaping power holes across the lineup.

Perhaps Mike Carp can be a full-time answer at DH beyond this one half-season. And perhaps Gutierrez can deliver the bat long expected from him if he comes to camp healthy next spring. Maybe Casper Wells can deliver power in left field.

But until the M's start to find some answers to this basic numbers problem, a guy like Seager -- of slender frame and who came up as a middle infielder -- will always be a question mark power wise for the M's if he plays third base. The M's just don't have enough power at the more easily-found spots to begin with.

Now, if Seager shows himself to be an .800-OPS-type over the longer haul, by all means, leave him at third base. But if he's really a low-.700s guy who is better suited as an everyday major league second baseman, the M's will again be putting themselves behind the eight-ball on offense to begin with.

Some will suggest there aren't all that many .800 OPS third basemen around anymore and that Seager at third would be fine with even a mid-to-high-.700s OPS. Perhaps on a better team, that would be fine. Perhaps if the goal was for the M's to be mediocre for years, that would work out. Or, if the M's can suddenly find a bunch of .800 OPS guys at three other spots, you could contemplate a .760-OPS Seager at third. For next year, that might be fine. But not for a team with designs on winning a title.

So, in a nutshell, that's the power and position issue. That's the Seager issue. It isn't so much about Seager -- having a great debut -- than it is about numbers elsewhere. Look at what the Red Sox bring to the table at both the traditional and non-traditional power spots, then look at the M's.

Remember, the goal as stated by GM Jack Zduriencik is to build a championship team. To do that, this offense has to get better. Not just a few dozen runs better. More like a couple of hundred. And it will have to do that by getting a respectable middle of the order out there next April when the games start to matter again.

It won't be easy. But it will be a heck of a lot harder if the team continues to fill the typical "power spots" in a lineup with guys who can't hit for power.

Friday, September 2, 2011 @ 8:23pm

Clean slate for Justin Smoak plus fun stuff

Shannon Drayer

MyNorthwest.com

Justin Smoak returns to the lineup tonight for the first time since suffering facial fractures in a game Aug. 12. His face is still healing but the swelling has gone down and everything feels normal to him. To protect the cheek he will wear a shield on his helmet when he bats right handed. Wearing the shield has been an adjustment.

"It's kind of hard to see out of," he said, "but I feel like I am getting used to it. It's nothing that is going to bother me, it's there to protect me."

The biggest test for him was in the field where he got hurt in the first place.

"Taking ground balls at Safeco last week was fine but when you go to Tacoma, it's a little different," he said with a laugh.

The fields in the minor leagues are not quite as even as the fields at the big league level.

"Everything was fine. I got a bunch of balls hit to me and everything felt normal."

There hasn't been a lot of normal for Smoak this year who was just coming off a thumb injury when he got hit in the face. He played through the injury for a good amount of time but his hitting suffered. He hasn't put up the numbers that many hoped he would in his first full season but as far as Eric Wedge is concerned, Smoak has a huge opportunity to finish strong and to that end Wedge is doing his part to take the pressure off. I asked if he was giving him a clean slate.

"I think that is where we are, I think that is a good way to put it," Wedge answered. "We all know what he is capable of doing. I have said before that I take as much responsibility as anything for it. I told you I wanted to leave him in the five hole and by necessity we moved him to three and then I make myself a liar and move him to the cleanup spot."

"I did everything I said I was not going to do but it was out of necessity and then he got banged up so I think he went through a lot of things he needed to go through this year. Now it's time to come back here, enjoy playing ball for the last 20 games and hopefully finish on a good note."

Wedge believes that Smoak still could hit cleanup in the future for the Mariners and that the pressure of hitting in that spot in the lineup ultimately was not what caused his numbers to drop off.

"I think he got in a position that regardless of where he was at he was trying to do too much early on because we weren't doing a whole lot otherwise." Wedge said.

Smoak has always insisted that he is comfortable in the middle of the order and said that bad habits were his biggest problem.

"I am just focusing on trying to keep it simple," he said. Stay on the ball, use the whole field and stop trying to pull everything. Earlier in the year I got pull happy and it goes to having a bad plan. If you have a good approach good things can happen and you got to put yourself in the best situation."

Fun stuff...Talk about a warm welcome, the visiting clubbies and bat boys were wearing the Larry Bernandez tee shirts today. They also set up a locker for Bernandez right next to Felix's locker...More Felix fun. Felix takes pride in his travel day suits and most are quite nice. Some are a little louder than others but Felix can pull it off. Last night's suit however...the color was almost indescribable. An electric blue/black metallic can't miss custom affair that must have taken at least six batteries to run. Oh yeah, and patent leather shoes to match. Wedge's description of the suit? "Kansas City blue, an expensive Kansas City blue, I'm sure," he said with a big laugh. When you are King...Last fun note, Brendan Ryan is usually the last out to the field to stretch and often he is running out while still getting dressed and eating a sandwich. Today he came out without the sandwich which was a surprise because there were In-N-Out burgers in the clubhouse. I told him I was surprised to see him come out not trying to get dressed and eat a burger at the same time. He laughed and said he already had one and considered having a second. "It was a lot harder when I had contacts," he said of his scurry to the field...

Originally published September 2, 2011 at 10:57 PM | Page modified September 2, 2011 at 11:02 PM

Clemens must face new perjury trial

By The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A federal judge ruled Friday that Roger Clemens must face another trial on charges of lying about drug use, although the judge criticized prosecutors' mishandling of evidence during a July mistrial and questioned the fairness of making the former star pitcher pay to defend himself twice.

U.S. District Judge Reggie Walton set a new trial for April 17. Clemens attorney Rusty Hardin said he may appeal Walton's decision. Walton said if Clemens wants to do that, he must request an expedited review by the appeals court to avoid more delays in the case.

Clemens listened intently while both sides argued passionately over his fate, but only spoke briefly to tell Walton he would waive his right to a speedy trial because a member of his defense team has another trial scheduled this fall requiring the long delay in his case.

Walton said although he's concerned about the prosecution's violation of his orders by showing jurors inadmissible evidence, current law does not allow him to throw out the indictment. He said the Supreme Court has set a high bar — Clemens needed to convince him that prosecutors intentionally goaded the ex-pitcher into requesting a mistrial.

Notes

- Sluggers Alex Rodriguez (thumb) and Mark Teixeira (knee) were out of the New York Yankees' lineup for their game against the Toronto Blue Jays.
- Chicago Cubs right-hander Carlos Zambrano will sit out the rest of the season after his 30-day suspension ends after games of Sept. 11.
- Stephen Strasburg allowed one hit and struck out four over six shutout innings Thursday for Class AA Harrisburg, Pa., in what was expected to be his final rehab start before he returns to the Washington Nationals.