

A's News Clips, Monday, September 26, 2011

Oakland A's deliver blow to Los Angeles Angels with rally in ninth

By Art Thompson III, Oakland Tribune

When there is nothing left to play for, professional pride takes over. That was the earmark of the A's performance in Sunday's series finale against the Los Angeles Angels.

The A's tallied four runs in the ninth inning for a 6-5 victory over the stunned Angels, whose wild-card playoff aspirations were damaged. They trail Boston by three games with three to play.

The A's won two of three in their final series against their A.L. West rivals.

After the ninth-inning rally, Andrew Bailey closed it out for his 15th consecutive save.

The ninth-inning offensive barrage featured Josh Willingham's 28th home run, a game-tying double by Kurt Suzuki, who was only 3 for 29 over the previous 10 games, and Coco Crisp's sacrifice fly that gave the A's the lead.

"Our whole team is just resilient," rookie second baseman Jemile Weeks said.

Considering that the A's have been offensively challenged this season but fought back to score all six of their runs in the final two innings Sunday, manager Bob Melvin termed it the best win that he could recall this year. Melvin took over June 9 when Bob Geren was fired.

"It was nice to get everyone involved," Melvin said. "It makes for good stuff."

With the Red Sox caught in a late-season swoon that has threatened their playoff hopes, the Angels remain alive in the wild-card race but just barely.

What do the A's have at stake? Not much, except for that professional pride thing.

"You find something to strive for," Crisp said. "The last two series of the year, you still have to go out and play hard. The pieces didn't fall for us this year, but there's always next year."

Crisp, who will be a free agent this offseason, played a key role in the offensive attack Sunday, with sacrifice flies in the eighth and ninth innings. Both times, Crisp was in a situation where he simply could focus on driving the ball.

"We feel good about having Coco up in those situations," Melvin said. "He's a smart hitter, and he's a switch hitter, so you know you're always going to get the matchups that you want."

The A's offense had little punch against Angels starter Joel Piñeiro, who retired the first 13 batters. David DeJesus got the A's first hit with an infield single. He promptly was erased when Scott Sizemore hit into a double play.

Through the first six innings, Piñeiro faced the minimum number of batters, after the veteran had gone 0-3 in his previous four starts facing Oakland this season, the A's hitting him at a .307 clip.

A's starter Rich Harden got a no-decision, after allowing eight hits and three runs in six innings. He will end the season winless in his last six starts.

After stealing third base in the seventh inning Sunday, Crisp now has been successful on 20 consecutive steal attempts, and with 46 stolen bases he has a chance to end the year as the A.L. base stealing champion.

Crisp is vying with the New York Yankees' Brett Gardner, who has 48 steals after getting two in Sunday's doubleheader against Boston. Crisp, however, has been caught only nine times to Gardner's 13.

A's first baseman Brandon Allen is experiencing the struggles at the plate that are typical of a young player going through his first extended experience in the big leagues.

Going into Monday's season-ending road series at Seattle, Allen is 12 for 93 over the past 26 games and has struck out 42 times.

Melvin said that Allen is going through an adjustment period, but the manager is not discouraged because he said Allen continues to work hard and has maintained a positive attitude.

Allen plans to play winter baseball, which Melvin said says a lot about Allen's commitment to improving as a player.

DeJesus left the game in the seventh inning when he was pinch hit for by rookie Michael Taylor.

De Jesus suffered a right hip contusion in the fifth inning when he made a brilliant running catch to rob Howie Kendrick of an extra-base hit. When making the catch, DeJesus slid feet first into the right-field corner, his hip slamming into the padded wall.

The A's won the season series 11-8 over the Angels, who are 27-27 against the A.L. West while the Texas Rangers, who repeated as champions, are 37-17 versus the West and 13-6 against the A's.

A's rally in 9th dings Angels playoff hopes

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

David DeJesus may be the all-time best hitter against the Angels, but he wound up watching the A's big comeback win in Anaheim from the bench with a bruised right hip.

He hurt the hip making a terrific hustling catch of a flyball by Howie Kendrick in the fifth - sliding, then smashing into the wall in right, and sort of exemplifying Oakland's never-say-die day. While the Angels are still hanging onto slim playoff hopes, it was the A's - long out of contention - who came back not once but twice to nail down a 6-5 victory Sunday.

"We were getting no-hit for a while, and then we came back to win the game," said DeJesus, who recorded Oakland's first hit in the fifth. "We showed our perseverance - several times."

The A's were down 3-0 in the eighth when Jemile Weeks drove in a run with a bases-loaded, one-out single to center, and Coco Crisp added another with a sacrifice fly. But the Angels scored twice in the bottom of the inning off Fautino De Los Santos to extend the lead back to three.

Josh Willingham led off the ninth against Jordan Walden with his 28th homer, then Scott Sizemore and Chris Carter singled (Carter ended an 0-for-22 slide) and Adam Rosales hit a shot up the middle. Walden got a glove on it but threw the ball away, and Sizemore scored. Then Kurt Suzuki, who'd pinch hit the previous inning, whacked a double down the first-base line to score Carter and tie the game. Crisp provided the winning margin with another sacrifice fly that scored Rosales.

"Being out of the race sucks, but at the same time, you have to play to win and to carry some momentum over to next year," Suzuki said.

"This is the best win for us, at this point, to me," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "It's nice to get everyone involved in a game like that."

DeJesus has been one of Oakland's few hot hitters this month, and he's a beast against the Angels, but he had to leave in the seventh with a right hip contusion. He's hitting .370 in the past nine games, and he is a career .337 hitter against the Angels, the highest mark by any hitter with at least 200 plate appearances against them.

"I like to hit here," he said with a grin.

A strong finish is important for DeJesus. He's a free agent after the season and is not expected to return to Oakland, so several scouts have been watching him the past month.

There are teams that believe DeJesus will have a big rebound season next year; one prevailing theory is that his confidence was shaken when he went into a platoon early on, and if he's left alone to play every day he should be fine.

"I wasn't playing every day, and it just got into my head," he said. "It was just about the confidence in my swing. When you're not feeling it, it's hard to find."

DeJesus, 31, is batting .237 with 10 homers and 46 RBIs. He entered the season a career .289 hitter.

"This year wasn't me," he said. "I want to break things down and understand what went wrong."

DeJesus is expected to get interest from numerous teams, with San Diego leading the pack. One plus for the Padres, DeJesus has played at a big stadium, so he won't be frightened off by Petco Park.

"I don't care about money and that stuff," DeJesus said. "I just want to go out there and trust in the player I am."

DeJesus will take off tonight's game at Seattle, but he hopes to return Tuesday.

Harden's future: Rich Harden finished the season 4-4 with a 5.12 ERA, and Melvin said that if the free agent returns next year, he'd be in the mix again in the rotation.

"I'd definitely be open to that," Harden said. "I like the organization. Bob Melvin has been great, I'd like the opportunity to play for him. We'll see what happens."

A's beat

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Paying their dues: Rookies were dressed in costumes and paraded in public for Sunday's hazing day. Highlights: Guillermo Moscoso as an elderly man, Graham Godfrey as Wolverine, speedy Jemile Weeks as Sonic the Hedgehog and reliever Andrew Carignan as the Giants' Brian Wilson.

Drumbeat: Rich Harden's last start, will he return to A's?

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Anaheim 9/25/2011, 12:17pm

It's Rich Harden's final start of 2011; he has not finished strong (his ERA is up to 5.17) but he has been healthy the entire second half. He'd like to return to Oakland, and I'd say that's something that could happen. He won't be

expensive, he'll likely be on one-year deals the rest of his career because of his injury history. Brandon McCarthy is also an injury risk and he'll be back for sure, so the A's could be looking again at hoping they have one of the two available at any given time. With Brett Anderson not available until July or so and Dallas Braden probably a bit behind the rest of the starters in the spring, Harden could add some depth.

Here's the lineup behind him today: Weeks 2b, Crisp cf, Matsui dh, Willingham lf, DeJesus rf, Sizemore 3b, Allen 1b, Sogard ss, Powell c.

Cliff Pennington probably won't be in action at all because of a left oblique strain and Kurt Suzuki is getting the day off.

Manager Bob Melvin was asked this morning if he believes Coco Crisp can win the stolen-base title (he's one behind Brett Gardner) and he gave it an emphatic yes - he mentioned Crisp's excellent percentage (he's 45 for 54) and his ability to get on base. I'd imagine we won't see many days off, if any, for Crisp the rest of the way.

If you missed it this morning, I had several items of note in today's Chronicle, including Josh Willingham's agent telling me he'd gone to the A's with some proposals for a multi-year deal last week and was told the team is in wait-and-see mode because of the stadium question. In addition, I reported Brandon Allen will play winter ball in the Dominican , and I have a truth vs. fiction piece on "Moneyball."

I'm getting lots of email on the Willingham story and the Moneyball piece. There is surprise the A's would cut payroll if they get the OK to go to San Jose, and it surprised me too, when I heard it, but if you think about someone such as Willingham, in particular, you can see the reasoning: 1) a new stadium wouldn't be ready for three years and his deal would run out before they'd move into a new place and 2) if they plan to rebuild with an eye toward San Jose - and they do, if they get approval for it - why sink \$27-30 million into a player if the team is not going to contend in that time?

Others ask how the team expects to keep fans if that's the case, and that's a tough one. Some fans enjoy watching the rebuild process because then they've seen the development of something special when the team becomes good, but others jump off, especially when the rebuilds continue and continue, ala the Royals. But mainly, I think the team believes that a move to San Jose with a good young core of players will attract far more fans in the end than they might lose with a rebuild.

I think some people are put off by the Moneyball story headline, and while reporters don't write headlines, which many people don't realize, I don't mind this one, it's having fun with the movie. Several readers patiently pointed out to me that it's a movie, but I felt I spelled that out pretty clearly, noting that the changes were for dramatic effect and storyline. I am aware, yes, that it's a movie. But not everyone knows what's accurate and not accurate in it, and some readers would like to know.

Anyone who doesn't want to know, or who knows already, is free to skip the story. If you feel the story wasn't for you, it probably wasn't. I appreciate you telling me so, but I don't know why you'd waste your time like that.

A's stage improbable comeback, stun Halos

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- Fautino De Los Santos proudly flaunted a bumblebee tutu costume, showcasing it in the middle of the A's clubhouse while dancing to salsa music. Guillermo Moscoso, perfectly playing the part of an old man thanks to a job well done by a makeup artist, looked on, capturing it all on camera.

Across the way, Jemile Weeks hesitantly stared down a Sonic the Hedgehog outfit picked just for him. Anthony Recker did the same, waiting as long as he could before suiting up as Minnie Mouse. Michael Taylor, meanwhile, made his way around in a rather small Cam Newton football jersey, likely meant for a 4-year-old rather than a 6-foot-5, 260-pound baseball player.

Rookie-hazing day always makes for a memorable scene, but Sunday's postgame shenanigans proved all the more enjoyable for an A's team that shook off a three-run deficit and combined for five runs in the final three innings to walk away with a thrilling 6-5 victory over the Angels.

At risk of giving up its spoiler status, Oakland appeared to be handing away yet another win on Sunday to the Angels, who looked to creep within 1 1/2 games of Boston in the American League Wild Card race.

In that case, the A's would have watched their own standing increasingly slip below the .500 mark. With just three base hits off Los Angeles right-hander Joel Pineiro through six innings, the A's were nine outs away from falling 17 games below that line with three to play.

Instead, they stormed back against the Angels' bullpen, grabbing hold of a rare one-run win during a season in which they've dropped 25 such contests.

"That's a team that's really good at home, that's fighting to stay in this thing," A's manager Bob Melvin said of the Angels. "Probably the best win to this point that I can think of for us."

Down 3-0 entering the eighth inning, the A's posted a two-spot -- fueled by Jemile Weeks' RBI single and a sacrifice fly from Coco Crisp -- to jump-start the comeback.

The Angels fought back for two runs against De Los Santos in the bottom half of the inning, again taking momentum. But the A's found plenty of their own in the ninth, when they collected four runs to grab the lead.

With Jordan Walden on the mound, Josh Willingham led off the inning with a solo shot -- his career-high 28th home run of the season -- to make it a 5-3 ballgame. One out later, Scott Sizemore and Chris Carter ripped back-to-back hits, and the former scored on an Adam Rosales' hard-hit liner up the middle that Walden fielded before throwing it away to the outfield for an error.

Pinch-hitter Kurt Suzuki, coming off the bench on a day he was to rest after fouling a ball off his knee on Saturday, took advantage of his little time at the plate and knotted the game with an RBI double to right field.

"First and third, I was trying to use the big part of the field," Suzuki said. "And knowing he throws so hard, you gotta be geared for that heater."

The A's weren't done, though. After Walden intentionally walked Weeks to load the bases before departing, lefty Hisanori Takahashi surrendered a sacrifice fly to Crisp, as Oakland completed the comeback.

"It seemed like everyone was involved today," Melvin said. "It's nice to have everyone involved in a game like that, makes for good stuff."

"I let the team down," Walden said. "We battled all day. I lost the game for us."

Starter Rich Harden settled on a no-decision, as he displayed a familiar performance in his final start of the season. The veteran quickly surrendered a first-inning lead by allowing a triple to Howard Kendrick and an ensuing RBI single to Bobby Abreu. The first-inning run marked the 15th run he's given up in the first inning through 15 starts.

Solo shots from Abreu and Vernon Wells off Harden in the third and sixth, respectively, further extended a Halos lead that was never lost. The right-hander, who went six innings, ended his season with a 4-4 record and a 5.12 ERA.

The numbers are not overwhelming, but the A's are encouraged with the fact that the oft-injured veteran was able to walk away from the season healthy, which could entice them to bring the free-agent-to-be back on a one-year contract again.

"You can't have enough depth," Melvin said. "I don't know where it goes and he's going to have some offers, but he's been a good fit here for us. You can never have too much starting pitching."

"That's definitely something I'm open to," Harden said. "I really like the team, like the guys, and Bob Melvin's been great. I've liked the opportunity to play for him. But we'll see what happens."

Around Harden, the A's are suffering their fair share of bumps and bruises. Shortstop Cliff Pennington was held out of Sunday's finale with left oblique tightness, while David DeJesus left the game with a right hip contusion in the fifth after sliding into the wall when making a nice catch on Kendrick's fly ball in the fifth.

Taylor took over for DeJesus in right field, and fellow youngsters Carter and Jai Miller were also inserted into the lineup late in the game. That same crop of September callups could see a good dose of playing time beginning Monday in Seattle, where Melvin envisions lending them a couple starts as the season winds down.

And the A's certainly plan on finishing their campaign with some momentum.

"Being out of it [stinks], but at the same time you've gotta play to win to try to carry some momentum over to next year," Suzuki said.

Mariners, A's aim to finish year strong in final series

By Chris Cox / MLB.com

The second half of the season didn't quite go as Mariners pitcher Jason Vargas hoped it would.

Despite going 6-6 with a 3.49 ERA through his first 18 starts of the year, Vargas has gone just 3-7 with a 5.90 ERA since the All-Star break.

He has a chance to end the year on a positive note, however, as the left-hander takes the mound in his final start of the season on Monday against the Athletics.

Vargas got the win in his last start on Tuesday against the Twins, when Seattle pulled out a 5-4 victory in a game where he admittedly didn't have his best stuff. Vargas gave up nine hits and four runs over six innings in the victory.

"I was all over the place," he said after the start. "I can't pinpoint any one thing, I was just having trouble really locking in. I tried throwing changeups early and I was just burying them. When I threw fastballs and went after them, I got outs. But when I was doing other stuff early and kind of getting behind them, it was more of a struggle. So I just had to go with what was working from inning to inning."

Vargas will need to have some of his better stuff on Sunday at Safeco Field, as he faces an A's club that he's already 0-3 with a 4.74 ERA against in four starts this season.

He'll oppose Oakland righty Brandon McCarthy, who enters his final start of the season boasting a 2-1 record and 1.55 ERA in four starts this month. He's 1-2 with a 1.14 ERA in three starts this season against the Mariners.

McCarthy limited the Rangers to one run over seven innings in his last start on Wednesday.

"I think I got away with a couple things, a few pitches I wasn't really thrilled with that they fortunately hit to somebody," McCarthy said following the outing. "But as a whole I felt like I was able to work at a good pace, throw a lot of strikes and stay ahead of guys. Generally that's a good recipe for success."

A's: Pennington held out again

Athletics shortstop Cliff Pennington was once again out of the lineup for Sunday's finale with the Angels due to left oblique tightness.

Pennington was a late scratch from Saturday's game before being held out completely on Sunday. Manager Bob Melvin said he'd try and stay away from using Pennington, regardless of how he feels after hitting off the tee.

"There's really no need to push it," he said.

Eric Sogard started in Pennington's place for the second straight game.

Mariners: Wedge wants more time for Smoak

Justin Smoak was back at first base for the Mariners on Sunday after missing some time and then coming back at designated hitter for four games following a groin muscle strain.

The youngster has had a rough two months to close the season, having dealt with a thumb injury, a broken nose and cheek bone, and then the groin strain.

"I wish we had more time," manager Eric Wedge said. "I really hate the time he's had to miss. He still has a tendency to get a little long to the baseball. I love when he's short and quick and right down to the baseball, versus times when he has a little length to his swing from the left side. But he's working on it. I think his BP has been a little better."

Worth noting

- With their three strikeouts on Saturday, the A's pitching staff entered Sunday's finale with 1,127 for the season. That ranks sixth in the American League and helped Oakland set a new franchise record. The previous high came in 2009, when the A's recorded 1,124.
- Mariners manager Eric Wedge is hoping to have infielder Luis Rodriguez back after missing three games with a cut hand. With starting shortstop Brendan Ryan unlikely to play in the final series thanks to a neck injury, rookie Kyle Seager is the only option at shortstop after spending most of the year at third base.

DeJesus exits game with right hip contusion

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- David DeJesus exited Sunday's game with a right hip contusion, and the right fielder will not play in Monday's series opener in Seattle in an effort to ease the pain, manager Bob Melvin said.

DeJesus slammed into the right-field wall in the fifth inning while making a nice play on Howie Kendrick's leadoff fly ball. He stayed in the game for one more inning before departing in favor of pinch-hitter Michael Taylor in the seventh.

Taylor is expected to get the starting nod in DeJesus' stead on Monday

Pennington sits with left oblique tightness

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- As expected, A's shortstop Cliff Pennington was held out of Sunday's series finale against the Angels because of left oblique tightness.

A's manager Bob Melvin said he'd likely try to stay away from using the infielder, even if he feels fine after hitting off the tee.

"There's really no need to push it," said Melvin, whose club has just three games remaining after Sunday.

Eric Sogard drew his second straight start at shortstop in Pennington's stead. Also coming off the bench was Landon Powell, who started behind the plate a day after regular Kurt Suzuki fouled a ball off his knee.

Worth noting

- Coco Crisp has been successful in each of his 19 stolen base attempts since the All-Star break, and entered Sunday ranked second in the American League with a career-high 45 stolen bases this season. The Yankees' Brett Gardner leads the league with 46, though manager Bob Melvin said he "wouldn't put it past Coco" to wear the stolen base crown on the final day of the season.

"I wouldn't bet against him," Melvin said. "When he gets on base he's always a threat to steal, and his percentage is always very good."

- The A's pitching staff recorded three strikeouts on Saturday and now has 1,127 for the season, which ranks sixth in the AL and represents a new franchise record. Since 1901, the previous high was 1,124, set in 2009.

A's rally to beat Angels

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ANAHEIM — Rookie closer Jordan Walden wasted a three-run lead in the ninth inning, throwing away a potential game-ending grounder as the Los Angeles Angels' playoff hopes were dealt a devastating blow with a 6-5 loss to the Oakland Athletics on Sunday.

The defeat left the Angels 2 1-2 games behind Boston and two games back of Tampa Bay in the AL wild-card race. Los Angeles has three games left.

Walden (5-3) relieved with a 3-2 lead and two outs in the eighth, and the Angels added a pair of runs in the bottom half.

But Josh Willingham homered leading off the ninth, and Scott Sizemore and Chris Carter singled with one out. Adam Rosales then hit a comebacker that could have been turned into a game-ending, double play, but Walden threw the ball past shortstop Erick Aybar and into center field as Sizemore scored.

Kurt Suzuki followed with a tying double, giving Walden his 10th blown save in 42 chances, and Coco Crisp's sacrifice fly put the A's ahead.

Fautino De Los Santos (3-2) won despite allowing Peter Bourjos' two-run single in the eighth, and Andrew Bailey pitched a hitless ninth for his 23rd save in 25 chances.

Pitching on his 33rd birthday, the Angels' Joel Pineiro retired his first 13 batters and allowed three hits in 6 1-3 scoreless innings.

Oakland's Rich Harden allowed three runs and eight hits in six innings and finished his season with a 5.12 ERA.

Bobby Abreu's RBI single in the first and third-inning homer built a two-run lead, and Vernon Wells' 25th homer made it 3-0 in the fifth.

Jemile Weeks' RBI single and Crisp's first sacrifice fly cut the gap to 3-2 in the eighth — the latter driving in the first run against Downs at home in 28 appearances this season.

NOTES: Oakland RF David DeJesus robbed Howie Kendrick of extra bases in the fifth, making a backhanded grab of his drive toward the right-field corner and colliding with the short padded fence. He bruised his left hip on the play, but played one more inning before leaving the game. ... For the second straight game, Angels 1B Mark Trumbo had to come out after six innings because of discomfort in his right ankle. ... A ceremonial first pitch was thrown by David Eckstein, the shortstop on the Angels' 2002 World Series championship team. ... Abreu batted .237 against Oakland this season with one home run. Last season, he hit .328 against the A's with six homers. ... Harden was 0-4 with a 6.75 ERA in seven starts against AL West teams this year, and 4-0 with a 3.86 ERA in eight starts against other clubs. ... Jered Weaver, whose final start of the season is Wednesday against Texas, has a chance to join John Lackey and Frank Tanana as the only Angels pitchers to win an ERA title in the past 35 years. His 2.41 ERA is one point behind Justin Verlander, who made his final regular-season start on Saturday. ... Oakland concludes its season with a three-game series at Seattle.