

Light-hitting A's stay course against Mariners, fall 4-0

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's have treated their fans to a pleasant surprise with their ability to bop the ball over the fence on occasion.

That alone won't guarantee they are a better offensive team this season.

Case in point was Saturday night's 4-0 loss to the Seattle Mariners at Safeco Field.

The A's mustered just five hits and put only three runners into scoring position against Hector Noesi (1-1), who went eight innings before Brandon League closed it out with a hitless ninth for Seattle.

The A's, 4-5 on the young season, still have a chance to win this three-game series Sunday afternoon. But so far, there just aren't enough players up and down the A's lineup stringing hits together.

"We're just pressing a little bit, and that's contagious," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "We need to score some runs early."

A's starter Tommy Milone (1-1) didn't pitch poorly. He gave up four runs over six innings, but with no offensive support, his margin for error was zero.

Through his first two starts with the A's, Milone has received a total of one run of support.

"You try to keep the team in the ballgame, and it feels like you can't give up any runs," Milone said. "It's hard. As a pitcher you wanna go out and throw up zeroes. It didn't happen today."

Mariners catcher Jesus Montero did the most damage against the young left-hander.

Montero lined a full-count pitch over the wall in left-center field in the second inning, the first run Milone had allowed as an Athletic.

The A's trailed just 1-0 when Milone loaded the bases in the sixth with one out. He nearly escaped the jam, but with two outs, he just missed on a full-count fastball to Justin Smoak, forcing in Brendan Ryan.

Then Montero went the opposite way with a two-run double that dropped just inside the right-field foul line to put Seattle comfortably ahead, 4-0.

"I thought the last pitch (on Smoak's walk) was a strike," Milone said. "But I'm biased."

Said A's catcher Kurt Suzuki: "It was a close pitch. Borderline pitches, you go back and look at it, it was probably outside."

The A's entered Saturday with eight home runs, their most over the season's first eight games since 2006, when they had nine. But they're now hitting .200 as a team, which ranks 27th out of 30 major league teams.

Their 25 runs are tied for 26th.

Part of the A's offensive woes can be attributed to the slow starts of Jemile Weeks and Coco Crisp, their Nos. 1-2 hitters who are supposed to be the offensive spark plugs.

Weeks, who went 1 for 4 on Saturday, is hitting .211. He did almost erase the shutout in the eighth, but his drive to center field bounced over the fence and went for a ground-rule double, which prevented Cliff Pennington from scoring from first base.

Weeks entered the game with a .270 on-base percentage.

"I feel like I'm kind of missing my pitch here and there," Weeks said before the game. "But I feel my approach is right. I'm on a good path."

Crisp, who went 0 for 4 on Saturday, is batting .176 with two RBIs.

But you can count Josh Reddick (.233), Yoenis Cespedes (.207), Suzuki (.188) and Josh Donaldson (.120) among those also struggling.

Weeks' two homers so far this season are noteworthy because it took him 90 games as a rookie last year before he finally cleared the fences. That 90-game homerless streak was the second-longest to start a career in Oakland history.

But Weeks points out that since coming up to the major leagues, he has focused on trying to hit the ball on the ground to take advantage of his speed. He says that contributed to his lack of power last season.

"I know the adjustments I've made to try not to hit the ball in the air," he said. "It's not my game. But if I get one good, I can put it out of the ballpark."

Melvin said he has no worries about Cespedes, who is tied for the major league lead with 13 strikeouts.

"He's on base over .350, he's slugging .700, he leads the team in RBIs," Melvin said before the game. "If that's a struggle, and there's nowhere to go but up, then 'up' is going to be pretty good."

Following Saturday's game, Cespedes' on-base percentage sat at .361 and his slugging .586. He leads the A's with three homers and seven RBIs.

Cespedes didn't strike out Saturday for the first time in nine games this season.

Noesi kept the A's off balance, striking out six and walking one.

"He was commanding his fastball on both sides of the plate," A's designated hitter Seth Smith said. "He had a little run and used his off-speed well."

Brandon McCarthy will pitch the A's series opener Monday against the Los Angeles Angels with Tuesday's starter still to be announced. Strong indications are it will be Tyson Ross, currently with Triple-A Sacramento.

Inside the Oakland A's: Pondering Jemile Weeks' odd start, and will Coco Crisp become a trade target?

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

There's been lots of mixing and matching with the A's daily lineups, but Bob Melvin trots out the same look tonight as in Friday's series opener:

A's: Weeks 2B, Crisp LF, Reddick RF, Cespedes CF, Smith DH, Suzuki C, Barton 1B, Donaldson 3B, Pennington SS; Milone LHP.

Mariners: Figgins CF, Ackley 2B, Ichiro RF, Smoak 1B, Montero C, Liddi 3B, Olivo DH, Wells LF, Ryan SS; Noesi RHP.

"I think the printing presses were on the fritz, so we had to go with the same lineup today," Melvin joked. ... I wouldn't say the A's knocked the cover off the ball last night, but I can understand not messing with a winning combination.

—What do we make of Jemile Weeks' hitting so far? The leadoff man is batting .206 with just seven hits, but two of them are homers. Melvin certainly won't argue when anyone on his team clears the fences, but I'd say this team is at its best when Weeks is getting on base more often and starting rallies so others can drive him in. Watch how his offense progresses for the rest of this road trip ...

—With Jacoby Ellsbury likely to miss extended time with a partially dislocated right shoulder, the Red Sox could be in the market for center field help. Fox Sports' Ken Rosenthal tweeted that Coco Crisp could be a potential target down the road. ... Makes sense to me. I could see Crisp generating interest from other teams too if he's having a productive season and the A's fall out of contention early. But that contract — two years at \$14 million through 2013 — might scare some buyers away. At any rate, Crisp is another player to watch as the season unfolds. He enters tonight's game hitting just .200 (6 for 30) with two RBIs in eight games.

—In the "Who Woulda Thunk It?" department, former Athletic Josh Willingham is leading the American League with a .444 average (12 for 27). Not far behind him is another ex-A's outfielder, Ryan Sweeney, hitting an even .400. Perhaps most surprising about Willingham — a strikeout machine in green and gold last season — he's whiffed just five times in his first eight games. I don't think many A's fans would trade Yoenis Cespedes for Willingham as their cleanup man right now. But it will be interesting to track how Willingham does this season compared to the power numbers that the A's produce with their current cast, given their lack of effort to re-sign Willingham last winter.

That's all for now ...

A's can't solve Mariners' King of Popups

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Using the same lineup that pinned a loss on Felix Hernandez the night before, the A's put together zilch against Hector Noesi on Saturday.

Oakland recorded just five hits against the Seattle right-hander in a 4-0 loss to the Mariners. They call Hernandez "King Felix," and Noesi could be the "King of Popups" - the A's hit nine balls in the air to infielders while he was on the mound.

"He was getting a lot of popups," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "The ball was riding, getting on us a little quicker than we were thinking, and he pitched inside."

Tommy Milone, who had worked eight scoreless innings in his Oakland debut last week, gave up a solo homer to Jesus Montero in the second, and three more runs in the sixth.

That was an inning in which Milone didn't get the benefit of a close call on a bases-loaded, two-out, 3-2 pitch to Justin Smoak, and Smoak walked to force in a run.

Melvin and catcher Kurt Suzuki said the pitch might not have been a strike, but Milone felt it was. "Obviously, as a pitcher, you want it to be a strike," he said. "It could have been a little bit off, but I'm biased."

Montero followed with a two-run double, and Smoak also tried to score on that drive to right, but Daric Barton - in the first real test of his surgically repaired shoulder - got him at the plate with a strong relay throw.

The A's struck out eight times Saturday, but none of the K's came from Yoenis Céspedes, who entered the game the major-league leader in strikeouts, with 13. It was his first strikeout-free game.

Melvin said he's not concerned about that strikeout total, pointing out that Céspedes has an on-base percentage over .350, a slugging percentage around .700, three homers and the team lead in RBIs, and all that despite facing Hernandez three times.

"If that's a struggle and there's nowhere to go but up, up is going to be good," Melvin said.

Hitting coach Chili Davis said the strikeout total is high, but then again, teams already are pitching Céspedes carefully.

"These guys know he's dangerous," Davis said. "I'm sure the scouting report is not to give him a fastball. They're going to test his patience."

While pleased that Céspedes drew three walks last week (he added another Saturday night), Davis said the best thing for the rookie would be some protection behind him. "There's not another threat in the lineup," Davis said. "We need to get the guys behind him hot."

Melvin said that the A's as a whole are in an offensive funk. "It's a contagious thing right now," he said. "All spring, we were scoring early in the game. ... Now it's the opposite. We need to get on it earlier in the game."

A's to adjust roster to open spot for 5th starter

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

When the A's call up a fifth starter, expected to be **Tyson Ross**, on Tuesday, they'll have to make a corresponding roster move.

The odd man out could be first baseman **Kila Ka'aihue**, now that **Daric Barton** is back as the everyday first baseman. Ka'aihue is out of options, unlike outfielder **Collin Cowgill**, but Cowgill has proven to be valuable off the bench.

Although Ka'aihue is batting .375 in three games, he doesn't present an alternative in terms of matchups; he and Barton both bat left-handed. Another possibility for giving Barton, who is coming back from shoulder surgery, a break is the right-handed hitting **Jonny Gomes**.

Well, OK, Gomes never has played first base in the big leagues, but he told manager **Bob Melvin** that he takes balls there every day when he is not in the lineup, and he is confident he can handle the spot.

"I worked out there all the time with the Reds," he said.

There are two other options with experience at first: **Josh Donaldson**, who played 10 minor-league games there plus an entire Arizona Fall League stint, and catcher **Anthony Recker**, who has 27 games of minor-league experience at first.

Melvin has said several times that he likes the current six-outfielder situation, in part because two of them (**Seth Smith** and Gomes) usually are also designated hitters and because Cowgill provides so much energy.

Melvin said that he will announce the fifth starter Sunday. It is almost assuredly Ross, but **Jarrod Parker** and **Brad Peacock** are pushing for spots, and both are likely to get called up at some point. Peacock allowed one hit and one earned run for Triple-A Sacramento on Friday, walking two and striking out eight.

A scout who saw Parker pitch at Sacramento recently said that Parker's stuff looks great and that his curveball is becoming more effective every time out.

Homer happy: Oakland hit eight homers in the first eight games, fifth most in the league and the A's best total over the first eight games since 2006, when they had nine.

Last year, Oakland didn't reach eight homers until Game 18.

A's on deck

Sunday

at Mariners

1:10 p.m. **CSNCA**

Godfrey (0-1) vs. Beavan (0-1)

Monday

at Angels

7:05 p.m. **CSN+2**

McCarthy (0-1) vs. Weaver (1-0)

Tuesday

at Angels

7:05 p.m. **CSNCA**

TBA vs. Haren (0-1)

Leading off

Barton so far: Manager Bob Melvin said he believes Daric Barton is being more aggressive at the plate this season. One case in point: Barton's rally-starting first-pitch single off Felix Hernandez on Friday. "I like it," Melvin said. Barton, returning from shoulder surgery, will be off Sunday.

Oakland Coliseum ushers show their sunny side

Al Saracevic, San Francisco Chronicle

If you want big crowds and assured confidence, go to AT&T Park and check out [the Giants'](#) show.

If you want small crowds and hardy perseverance, cross the Bay Bridge and take in an [A's](#) matinee.

Out at the Coliseum this past week, as the glow of Opening Day wore off and the team slogged its way through a rain-soaked series with the Royals, the crowds grew thin, and frustration was the coin of realm. Season-ticket holders grumbled about owner **Lew Wolff's** stingy ways and bemoaned the team's lackluster outlook.

Things are a bit dour in Oakland these days, but you sure wouldn't know it from the ushers. The happy ushers of Oakland Coliseum should get some kind of award. The Croix de Coliseum? A lifetime supply of Prozac?

It's an eclectic group of youngsters, moonlighters and retirees. There's a former Pac Bell exec. A former Schwab exec. They even have a judge in their midst, one **Harlan VanWye**, who mans the lower bowl with a smile and a story no matter what's happening on the field.

Bill Wiebalk is one of the supervisors of this motley crew, and he couldn't be happier. He told himself he'd give the job a try for one season ... eight years ago.

"I'm proud of our workforce," Wiebalk said. "They love what they do. We haven't needed to replace anyone in over three years.

"We have nurses, teachers, paralegals," he said with a smile. "It's a great environment."

You don't hear that too often in that neighborhood. Unless you're talking to one of the happy ushers.

"We get a lot of heat because of a lack of fans," Wiebalk said. "But the fans that do come, they're great. They're dedicated. They pay me to B.S. with them."

So, what's the best part of being an usher in an empty stadium? Foul balls, of course.

"We try to get all we can, to give to the kids," Wiebalk said. "It's a highlight. We trade them with each other just to give to the kids."

Keep smilin', Bill. Oakland needs you.

Vivek's vision: Warriors owners **Joe Lacob** and **Peter Guber** get most of the ink. But one of their partners in the owners suite, **Vivek Ranadivé**, has plenty to say, too.

The Silicon Valley CEO revolutionized Wall Street 20 years ago when his software firm, Tibco, computerized the trading business. Now the man has his sights set on revolutionizing basketball by raising its profile in his home country of India.

We caught up with Ranadivé at the Warriors' Bollywood night Thursday, a high-energy affair that ran concurrently with a low-energy Warriors loss to the Mavericks. Amid a crowd of saris and samosas, Ranadivé talked about his vision for basketball in India.

"Indians love sports. They love cricket," Ranadivé said. "But basketball is the fastest growing sport there. In the next decade, I hope basketball becomes the second biggest sport in India."

The tech titan, whose influence on the Warriors includes this week's release of a new [Golden State Warriors](#) Mobile iPhone app, believes soccer was the global sport of the 20th century, but basketball will play that same role in the 21st century.

"It's only a matter of time before we have an Indian player in the NBA," he said.

Who might that player be? Keep your eye on a 15-year-old, 7-foot-1 kid from Punjab named **Satnam Singh**. He has come over stateside to train in Florida, and Ranadivé thinks he might be the one.

If you have a hard time believing a tech exec when it comes to basketball, maybe you'll listen to **Jerry West**. Vivek "has such amazing wisdom, both about basketball and life," said the man known simply as "The Logo."

"Why shouldn't we have a kid from India play in the NBA?"

Closer to home, West sounded bullish about the Warriors' future.

"You're going to see a terrific team here in a year," said West. "I love the Lakers. They were my life. But I don't want to see anyone wearing a Lakers jersey in this building in the future."

Reggie's track suit: Reggie McKenzie, the Raiders' new general manager, is about to orchestrate the team's first NFL draft since **Al Davis** died. That's a pretty big track suit to fill.

Luckily, Reggie's a big guy. Asked about his plans this past week, the soft-spoken giant trotted out some of the usual platitudes about drafting the best player available and being patient.

But he admitted that he was a little nervous - even suffering a sleepless night or two.

"This has been his deal since the Raiders have been the Raiders," said McKenzie, referring to the late owner. "I'm the new guy. It's huge."

I was interested to hear whether McKenzie shares Davis' penchant for speed. Yes and no, it turns out.

"Speed is always going to be important," McKenzie said. "But speed only? We're not looking for guys that just run fast."

Most of us in the room paused for a moment, waiting for a sign or a thunderclap, but Davis stayed out of the discussion.

"Size is good, but size and speed will always matter," McKenzie resumed. "Speed plays a part. But when it all comes down, the question is, 'Can the guy play football?' "

Two days later, the Bay Area suffered its worst lightning storm in decades. Just saying.

Will's thrill: Speaking of lightning, Giants legend **Will Clark** was on a plane when the big lightning storm hit the Bay Area on Thursday night, and just like his playing days, he got a hit.

The Thrill was on a flight coming into SFO a little after 9 p.m. when the turbulence got bad. "You could hear this sound reverberating through the plane ... Wack-a-whoosh-ooshhh," Clark said after Friday's home opener.

He was sitting near the wing and saw the lightning hit the plane.

The pilot pulled up and diverted the flight to Sacramento. After they landed, the crew told the passengers they could stay on the plane or get off.

"I said, 'I'm off,' " said Clark, who got a rental car and drove into San Francisco about midnight.

"I can scratch that one off the bucket list," quipped Clark.

Century club: Nineteen golfers answered the call for the First Tee of Oakland on Monday. Hopefully all were sitting on their butts watching **Bubba Watson's** Masters victory a day earlier, because their task was to play 100 holes in under nine hours at Sequoyah Country Club.

That's a pace of five minutes per hole, but when it was all over, the mostly middle-age and mostly exhausted group of do-gooders focused on the number that put a smile on the face of First Tee executive director **April Kenyon**. Her organization expects to reap more than \$25,000 from the unusual fundraiser, which proved to be its biggest ever. Unfortunately, that's not even half of the group's annual budget, so don't be shy if you want to help a good cause.

Two of the participants were First Tee kids ages 8 and 11. Finisher **Lauren Barr**, a member of the Sharp Park Golf Course Women's Club, spent a bit of time with them at the turn and said: "Sitting at lunchtime with some of the kids who participate in the First Tee program really brought it home for me. Yes, we were there to raise money and have fun in a one-of-a-kind sporting event. But the real purpose of the 100-hole challenge was to benefit the young people whose lives are so positively impacted by the First Tee and its mission. Based on the 8- and 11-year-olds I met this Monday, the mission is succeeding."

Barr and her teammate, former Chronicle golf writer **Susan Fornoff**, won the women's division in the two-person scramble format at 489 because they were the women's division. Organizer **Bernie Herlihy** calculated par at 390; the top-scoring team of **Brandon Huneke** and **Jamie Rector** checked in at 45 under, but most important, Huneke led the fundraisers with an estimated \$5,700 in pledges. He's an assistant at host Sequoyah Country Club, and the members came through for him.

Jonathan Sanchez quickly returns to S.F. as Royal

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

Days before the Giants' home opener, **Jonathan Sanchez** walked around downtown San Francisco and got recognized for his no-hitter in 2009 and contributions down the stretch in 2010, among other things.

"When you go to a town where you spent six years and everybody says, 'We remember you, we miss you, we want you back' and stuff like that, it makes you feel like you did something positive for the city," Sanchez said.

The Royals stayed in the city during their series in Oakland, and Sanchez got a chance to reflect on his time as a Giant and new life in Kansas City in the wake of his Nov. 7 trade for **Melky Cabrera**.

In an interview, Sanchez thanked the Giants for his opportunity to pitch in the majors, commended the coaching staff and said he still converses with several ex-teammates.

For now, he said he belongs in Royal blue.

"I'm here for a reason. It was time for me to go from there," Sanchez said of the Giants. "They had their plan. They got what they needed. I wasn't in their plans. I'm here with Kansas City now. They want me here. I feel good here."

With **Tim Lincecum** and **Matt Cain** leading a rotation that includes young **Madison Bumgarner** and back-in-the-fold **Ryan Vogelsong**, and with \$46 million still due **Barry Zito**, Sanchez was the odd man out. He's one year from free agency and is earning \$5.6 million.

"I knew I was going to be a free agent next year. That's a big thing for me," Sanchez said. "I knew they weren't going to sign me with Lincecum and Cain and Zito. They have big contracts, so it was going to be hard for that team to sign me again.

"I'll be a free agent, and maybe they'll be the first team to call. You never know."

Seriously?

"I love it here. I'm fine here," Sanchez said. "They gave me the opportunity."

Sanchez is a complex, sometimes maddening, pitcher. He compiles a lot of strikeouts and walks and sometimes is annoying because he doesn't always go after hitters aggressively enough.

Since 2008, he ranks third in the majors in most strikeouts per nine innings (9.37) and third in fewest hits per nine innings (7.47), but he also averages a whopping 4.7 walks per nine innings. In the 2010 championship season, he struck out 205 batters but issued a league-high 96 walks.

Nobody complained late in 2010, when he posted a 1.03 ERA in his last seven starts and beat the Padres in the division-clinching finale.

"Many good stories over there," said Sanchez, who ranks the World Series title and his no-hitter as memories 1 and 1A.

(There's already a good story this year, too: Sanchez plunked Cleveland's **Shin-Soo Choo** on Saturday, prompting both benches to empty. See Page B4.)

He called pitching coach **Dave Righetti** "the best" for what he taught, especially about focus, and commended Zito for his shutout in Colorado, saying, "Amazing. He's had tough years, but the way he handled everything, he's special. No matter how he does, he's always professional."

During the interview, Sanchez reached into his Coliseum locker and pulled out his World Series ring. He's the only Royal with one. This is a team on the rise, looking for its first winning season since 2003, and Sanchez could be a difference maker if he's back to 2010 form - now that he's healed from the ankle sprain that shelved him late last season.

"My goal is trying to help get this team to the playoffs," he said. "The Giants taught me a lot of things about being a pitcher and being a teammate and being professional. It was just time to move on."

Shea Hey

So **Willie Mays'** first season in San Francisco was 1958?

Look again.

It was 1946, according to Baseball-Reference.com, the super website that recently included in its data base the most comprehensive compilation of statistics from the Negro Leagues.

Thanks to a decade of extensive research that was commissioned by the Hall of Fame, the website includes Negro League players from 28 different leagues as well as independent teams.

I came across the West Coast Baseball League, which included the San Francisco Sea Lions and Oakland Larks, and a recognizable name on the Sea Lions' roster: Willie Mays.

As in the Say Hey Kid's dad. Nickname: "Cat." According to the site, which isn't considered complete, he was born in 1910 and died in 1999, making him 35 when he briefly played in San Francisco - 12 plate appearances and 2 2/3 innings on the mound.

I told all this to the Giants' **Willie Mays**, a high schooler in Alabama in '46.

"Could be. I don't know," he said. "I never heard my dad say anything about playing out here. The only thing I knew about was him playing in Birmingham on the steel mill team."

The West Coast Baseball League (or West Coast Baseball Association) was formed by **Abe Saperstein** of Harlem Globetrotters fame and **Jesse Owens**, and disbanded after a few months.

Two years later, young Willie, 17, played on the 1948 Birmingham Black Barons team that appeared in the final Negro League World Series.

On the day we celebrate the 65th anniversary of **Jackie Robinson** breaking the color barrier, I'd suggest it's a perfect time to dive into the fascinating history of the Negro Leagues, statistically speaking.

Play it again

When batters hit RBI singles, we often see them round first base and get caught in rundowns. They're instructed to do that in certain situations, including with two outs. They'd prompt the cutoff man to catch the ball, preventing a play at the plate. Or, if the ball isn't cut, the runner easily could get into scoring position.

"It's not black and white," Giants third base coach **Tim Flannery** said. "When we're playing for one run, you'll exchange an out for a run. With two outs, when you (think) a guy's going to be out (at the plate), that's when you keep going."

Friday, **Aubrey Huff** was tagged out after his single to right scored **Buster Posey**. In this case, he probably should have stayed at first because Posey was scoring easily. As it turned out, Pirates first baseman **Casey McGehee** took the cut and trapped Huff for the third out.

The bullpen

-- Imagine **Yu Darvish**'s delight when he gave up four first-inning runs and got credit for an 11-5 victory in his Rangers debut. Darvish was the **Tim Lincecum** of Japan last year in terms of run support. Lincecum received 2.94 runs per game, worst support in the majors. Darvish got 2.86 runs a game.

-- Phillies manager **Charlie Manuel** was ticked that **Ryan Howard**, in rehab after surgery to repair his Achilles tendon, charged up the dugout steps and ran onto the field during introductions at the Phillies' home opener. Manuel wanted Howard to walk.

-- After making his big-league debut, Mariners reliever **Erasmo Ramirez** grabbed a game ball and scribbled the names of three Rangers he struck out and the guy who homered off him, **Josh Hamilton**. He wondered about asking Hamilton to sign it.

-- Is **Derek Jeter** in better shape this year? According to the New York Post, a scout said the 37-year-old Yankee is getting out of the box quicker and was timed going home to first in 4.24 seconds. The average time for a right-handed hitter: 4.3.

-- It figures to be an ugly year for the Cubs. After opening 1-5, their worst start since 1997, tickets were available for Thursday's game on Stubhub.com. For three bucks.

-- A's fans remember **Josh Willingham** as a good hitter and not-so-good defender, so who was surprised when he homered and committed two errors in the Twins' home opener? It's not a trend. He has more homers (four) than E's (two).

-- After pitcher **Gio Gonzalez** got his first big-league hit, he ran the bases as if it was his first time - and it was. He was forced at the plate and told reporters, "Goodyear has not sponsored me yet."

The Drumbeat: Hector Noesi baffles A's in Mariners' 4-0 victory

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Safeco Field, 4/15/2012, 8:40pm

So the A's find a way to beat Felix Hernandez on Friday night, and then Saturday night, they couldn't get a man past second base against Hector Noesi through the first seven innings in a 4-1 loss to Seattle. They call Hernandez "King Felix," and Noesi could be the "King of Pop-ups" – the A's hit nine balls in the air to infielders while he was on the mound.

Manager Bob Melvin said that balls were getting in on A's hitters quicker than they anticipated, and Noesi was also working inside effectively. Catcher Kurt Suzuki said that Noesi was pounding the strike zone, with good movement on his fastball, and the A's were just missing – thus, the pop-ups.

Meanwhile, A's starter Tommy Milone gave up a solo homer to Jesus Montero in the second inning, then he was given few breaks by home-plate umpire Jeff Kellogg in the sixth inning. He walked in the first run in that inning on a pitch that looked pretty decent, and he then gave up a two-run double to Montero. (Justin Smoak was thrown out at the plate trying to be the third run to come in on that drive to right, but Daric Barton got him with a strong relay throw, showing that surgically repaired shoulder is just fine.)

Afterward, Milone said he thought the 3-2, two-out pitch Smoak walked on was a strike ("I'm biased," he admitted); Melvin and Suzuki both thought perhaps it was not a strike, but whatever the case, it was certainly close and, as Melvin said, Milone did pitch well overall. "He didn't get whacked around," Melvin said.

Oakland got precious little from anyone apart from Cliff Pennington, who had a pair of singles, and Jemile Weeks, who doubled to center in the eighth. Pennington was left at third and Weeks at second when Coco Crisp popped to short.

Noesi worked eight innings and allowed five hits. He walked one – Yoenis Cespedes in the seventh. Cespedes did not strike out in a game for the first time this season, but he got no hits, either.

Oakland has been shut out twice already in 2012. The team has failed to register double digits in hits in any of its nine games. The offense, just enough Friday night, was mostly invisible Saturday.

"It's a contagious thing right now," Melvin said. "All spring, we were scoring early in games and feeling good about it, now it's the opposite. ... We need to get on it earlier in the game."

Milone tough, but A's bats can't dent Mariners

By Jane Lee / MLB.com | 4/15/2012 1:00 AM ET

SEATTLE -- The A's and Mariners, clearly having seen enough of each other this season, did their best to minimize their time together on the field on Saturday, completing five innings in less than an hour's time.

But the sixth, at least the bottom portion of it, proved far too long for the A's liking -- not to mention far too destructive -- as the Mariners expanded a one-run lead by three and never gave it back in handing Oakland a 4-0 loss.

For as much as A's starter Tommy Milone labored in that inning, a 28-pitch marathon, his teammates' struggles at the plate in every frame didn't help his cause.

As a team, Oakland entered the day batting just .205. A quiet five-hit performance against Mariners right-hander Hector Noesi, who just five days earlier was knocked out after three-plus innings of seven-run ball in Texas, brought that number back down to the Mendoza Line.

"I think it's a contagious thing, right now," manager Bob Melvin said. "All spring we were scoring early in the game, getting guys on early and had a good feeling. Right now, it's just the opposite. We're having trouble getting something going early on, and this was the first game we didn't get something going at all at some point in the game. But we need to put pressure on the pitcher early in the game and try to create some momentum."

"You want to get off to a good start," said Kurt Suzuki, who is batting .188. "It's tough, because if you don't [have success] in the first seven games or so, everyone's going to make a big deal of it. You want to stay with the process and keep trucking along. You have to focus on going out there and having quality at-bats."

But quality at-bats have been few and far between for Oakland, particularly with runners aboard. The A's, who left a total of six stranded while going 0-for-2 with runners in scoring position, have now tallied fewer than 10 hits in each of their first nine games, the most sub-10-hit games to start a season since 1978 (10).

As a result, there's been little room for error by the pitching staff. Just ask Milone, who was coming off eight scoreless innings in his season debut and, from the get-go on Saturday, appeared primed for a similar showing by retiring 16 of the first 17 batters he faced.

The outlier, Jesus Montero, was the only one to reach base during that time -- and he touched them all, courtesy of a one-out solo shot to center field in the second.

Montero again produced heavy applause in the sixth, this time with a two-run double that highlighted Seattle's big inning. It all started with Brendan Ryan, who grounded a ball to center for a base hit. Chone Figgins' ensuing single put runners at second and third after he took second on Coco Crisp's throw back to the infield, and Milone issued free passes to two of the next three batters to walk in a run.

The second, to Justin Smoak, was nearly an inning-ending strikeout instead -- at least from Milone's view. With a full count on Smoak, the lefty threw a fastball he believed was a strike.

"I thought the last pitch was a strike. But, obviously, being the pitcher, I want it to be a strike," Milone said. "Who knows? It could have been a little bit off. But I'm biased, I want it to be a strike."

Melvin and Suzuki, however, admitted home-plate umpire Jeff Kellogg's call was likely the right one.

"I don't think the 3-2 pitch was a strike," Melvin said.

Added Suzuki: "It was a close pitch, but it was one of those borderline pitches that you look back and it's probably a little outside."

Montero's double down the right-field line followed, and Josh Reddick's relay throw to Daric Barton was perfectly passed along to Suzuki at the plate in time to nail Smoak and end the fateful frame.

The A's, meanwhile, nearly got to Noesi with two outs in the eighth, when Cliff Pennington notched his second base hit of the night and Jemile Weeks moved him to third on a ground-rule double. But Crisp's popout to shortstop -- one of nine Oakland popouts on the night -- ended the A's threat.

"He was getting a lot of popups, which means his ball was getting on us a little quicker than we thought, and he pitched in," Melvin said of Noesi, who struck out six and walked one in the winning effort.

"He was just pounding the strike zone," Suzuki said. "He had good movement on his fastball and threw a few good changeups in there. He pitched well tonight, moved the ball around a lot."

For Noesi, the task proved rather easy, thanks to a familiar face behind the plate in Montero, his old Minor League buddy.

"We just got into it, like, 'This is the game, let's enjoy it,'" the Mariners pitcher said. "He talked to me about whatever we talk about, like, 'Let's play a game.'"

It was one that didn't go so well for Milone and Co.

"It's always a little harder when you're not scoring runs, because you're trying to keep the team in the ballgame and you feel like you can't give up any runs," Milone said. "But it happens. And as pitcher, you want to throw up zeroes -- and I didn't do that today."

Weeks plans to wear No. 42 with pride

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

SEATTLE -- By the time Jemile Weeks was born in 1987, baseball was already celebrating the 40th anniversary of Jackie Robinson's color-barrier breaking entrance in the game.

Yet Weeks, now 25, heard plenty tales about the baseball legend from several family members, some of whom have ties to the Negro Leagues, including his grandfather.

"I heard about him, read about him, watched movies on him," Weeks said. "It's definitely an interesting story and an interesting part of our baseball history."

These days, Weeks is writing the early chapters of his own history, enjoying the beginning of his second Major League season after putting up impressive numbers in his rookie year. However, this will mark the first time he'll be wearing a big-league uniform -- donning No. 42, alongside his peers -- on Jackie Robinson Day, to be celebrated across the nation in every park on Sunday.

And for that, Weeks is very much grateful.

"I think, being an African-American player especially, you have to take pride in that," he said. "You have to understand the significance of what he did and what it means to the game of baseball. I obviously pride myself in it, and with family members tied in with the Negro Leagues, I'm appreciative of what he went through and the process it took."

Robinson's journey wasn't an easy one, during a time when racism was heavily prevalent in America. But he took none of those struggles to the field with him, instead leaving it with the Rookie of the Year Award, while also finishing fifth in the Most Valuable Award voting in his first season.

Just two years later he finished first, marking one of many accomplishments during a tremendous 10-year career with the Dodgers, whom he helped to a World Series title in 1955. All have been noted by Weeks, who is a big believer of keeping in perspective the strides that have been made in baseball since Robinson's arrival.

"I think, if you look around the clubhouse right now, how many African-Americans do you see?" Weeks said. "And I think you can say that in any clubhouse. You gotta keep that revived, keep it coming, because it's tough to get to those African-American communities and it's tough for them to see a face like themselves on TV. To keep a Jackie Robinson Day alive, it at least supports the players that are playing to go out there and maybe try to reach out to others and use Jackie Robinson as a symbol."

Godfrey, Beavan square off in series finale

By AJ Cassavell / MLB.com | 4/15/2012 1:30 AM ET

Less than a dozen games into the 2012 season, the A's and Mariners have already played each other six times in three different cities spanning two countries.

They'll finally head their separate ways for a while on Sunday, but not before the two familiar foes play the rubber match of a three-game set in Seattle.

The two clubs played twice in Tokyo to start the season, they played twice in Oakland last week, and on Sunday they'll meet for the final time until June 25.

Graham Godfrey gets the ball for the A's, while Seattle will turn to Blake Beavan. The two righties are each coming off very solid starts in which they weren't given any run support and were dealt tough losses.

For Beavan, holding the heavy-hitting Rangers to just one run in 6 1/3 innings was no small feat, even though Texas came away with a 1-0 victory on Tuesday.

"I think the biggest thing that was working for me [during] my last start was mainly just my fastball," Beavan said. "I probably threw it 85 percent of the time. Just locating my fastball when I needed to and making pitches when I needed to. I think any time you can stop that lineup, keep them grounded at three runs or less, that's something that's just a bonus for yourself as a pitcher."

Now, Beavan faces the A's, who roughed him up last season. He posted a 1-2 mark against Oakland with a 7.56 ERA.

Godfrey was equally unlucky on Tuesday, tossing six innings of two-run ball while his team was shut out. He'll be looking forward to better weather in his second start of the season, after a rain-shortened start against the Royals.

A's: Barton set for day off

A's first baseman Daric Barton will get the day off on Sunday, his first since rejoining the team. Manager Bob Melvin has liked what he's seen from Barton, who was delayed this spring while rehabbing his surgically-repaired right shoulder.

"I'm really pleased with how he's doing," Melvin said. "We're constantly monitoring his shoulder, but the velocity in his swing is better. He looks more aggressive to me than he did last year. Everything about his game looks more aggressive, more confident to me."

Barton has four hits -- one a double -- in 16 at-bats this season. He also has two walks.

- Through nine games this year, the A's have already bashed eight home runs. It comes after a 2011 campaign in which they didn't notch their eighth home run until Game 18.

Mariners: Carp's return will shake up roster

Mike Carp is ready to come off the disabled list, and that means it's decision time for Seattle manager Eric Wedge. Carp, who sprained his right shoulder on Opening Day in Tokyo, spent his second day in a rehab stint with Triple-A Tacoma on Saturday.

With Carp's spot on the roster pretty much assured, the decision could come down to infielder Alex Liddi and outfielder Casper Wells.

"We're going to keep the guys up here [who] we feel like [give] us the best chance to win ballgames, and the ones that stay up here are going to be because they continue to do that," Wedge said.

- Sunday's game will be the last of 11 straight games within the division to start the season for the M's. They face Cleveland on Tuesday.

- Jesus Montero's second-inning home run on Saturday extended his hitting streak to eight games. He has recorded a hit in eight of his nine games with Seattle.

Worth noting

- Mariners right fielder Ichiro Suzuki is hitting .327 lifetime against the A's. He has seven hits in 25 at-bats this season (.280).

- On Friday night, A's second baseman Jemile Weeks notched his second home run against Seattle this season. He went homerless in the first 90 games of his career, but now has four in his last 16 games.

Weeks showing some early power

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

SEATTLE -- Exact calculations have Jemile Weeks on pace to hit 40 1/2 home runs this season.

"You always round up," a neighboring teammate said in the A's clubhouse, smiling.

Either way, that's a large number for the small-statured Weeks. And while it reflects a small sample size -- he has two home runs in the first nine games -- it also showcases a different aspect of the second baseman's game that wasn't on display much last season.

Weeks went without a home run in the first 90 games of his rookie season, but has since tallied four in the past 16 games, dating back to last year.

"He's feeling more confident in driving the ball," manager Bob Melvin said. "Last year, it didn't seem like he was ever going to hit a home run -- nor was he ever trying to hit a home run, nor was he ever hitting balls hard enough to hit a home run. Now, you're seeing a more confident guy that's learning himself at the plate, learning his swing, and he's driving the ball. He'll hit his share of home runs."

Not necessarily ever intentionally, though.

"I'm not trying to hit home runs at any point," Weeks said. "I'm just trying to put a good swing on the ball and hit it hard. I think it's just when you get a chance to center a ball up as much as possible and know how to use your body type to generate the most out of each swing. I think, just the way I've learned how to swing, when I catch a ball good and I meet it well, the way I've taught myself to swing, it can produce that every now and then."

Despite having already hit two long balls this year -- tied with Jonny Gomes for most among any A's player not named Yoenis Cespedes -- Weeks ended Saturday batting just .211, with a dismal .268 on-base percentage.

"His game, for the most part, is going to be as a table-setter," Melvin said. "He is a strong kid, and you're going to see him drive some balls. But for a guy like him, you can overdo it just a little bit, and I'm not saying he's doing that right now. He's also getting some tough luck. He feels good at the plate. The average, at this point, may not show it, but I think he's doing a nice job and he'll continue to do what he does at the top of the lineup. You're just not seeing the hits you would normally expect out of him at this point, but they'll pick up."

Melvin: Not worried about Cespedes' strikeouts

SEATTLE -- Mention Yoenis Cespedes' Major-League leading 13 strikeouts to Bob Melvin, and the A's manager will fire back with other numbers.

"He's also on base over .350, he's also slugging [nearly] .700, he's also had to face Felix [Hernandez] three times, he also has three home runs and leads the team in RBIs," Melvin said, quickly. "He's been on base six other times via walk and hit by pitch. If that's a struggle, there's no way to go but up -- and up is going to be pretty good."

So he's not worried about the strikeout total?

"I'm not that worried," Melvin said. "The times, obviously, you would like to see him not strike out is with a man on third and less than two outs. But, again, I think he's on a nice pace right now -- especially for a guy that has a big learning curve."

Friday marked the first time this season Cespedes did not reach base, and he has gone down on strikes at least once in each of his first eight games. But the swing-and-misses don't appear to be fazing him much.

"A lot of guys, if they get two or three strikeouts, they get defensive and their confidence goes down," Melvin said. "You definitely don't see that from him. He's still letting it go, he's still tenacious in every at-bat, and he still feels like every time he goes up there he's going to do something good. We feel the same way on the bench, so we need more time to figure out whether he's striking out too much. But he's not scared, definitely not scared."

Montero, Noesi lead Mariners past Oakland 4-0

By TIM BOOTH AP Sports Writer

Jesus Montero wanted to make a good impression during his first homestand in Seattle.

Hitting a line-drive, 415-foot home run to center at Safeco Field is impressive for anyone—rookie or veteran.

"It was cool. It was exciting for me to hit a home run in this field. It's a huge field," Montero said. "I was impressed."

Montero finally made the splash Seattle has been waiting for with a solo homer and a two-run double, and Hector Noesi threw eight sharp innings to lead the Mariners past the Oakland Athletics 4-0 on Saturday night.

The two centerpieces Seattle received in its major offseason trade with the New York Yankees shined together on the same night. Montero showed off his power with a line-drive homer in the second inning and later his ability to go to the opposite field by ripping a two-out double just inside the right-field line to give the Mariners a 4-0 lead.

Meanwhile, Noesi (1-1) was brilliant on the mound, rebounding from a rough first start for Seattle. He gave up five hits and struck out six in his first major league win as a starter.

"Hector did a great job of mixing all of his pitches, of using all of his pitches," Seattle manager Eric Wedge said. "He did a nice job when he was ahead but he did a nice job when he was behind, too. He was a complete pitcher out there."

There were plenty of expectations when Seattle gave up All-Star pitcher Michael Pineda to get Montero and try to help its staggering offense. The goal by bringing in the young slugger was finding a bat that could provide the pop Seattle's offense has missed but would remain under the team's control for a number of years.

Montero's power had not shown up through the first couple of weeks, but it was on display Saturday. Montero lined a 3-2 pitch from starter Tommy Milone (1-1) over the wall in center in the second inning. It was his first extra-base hit in a Mariners uniform and he was given a standing ovation by the appreciative home crowd.

But that was it for the Mariners offense until the sixth. Seattle got its first hit since Montero's homer when Brendan Ryan lined a single with one out. Ryan then got gutsy and made it to third on Chone Figgins' single to left-center, with Figgins going to second on the throw. Dustin Ackley walked to load the bases for Ichiro Suzuki, but Seattle's new No. 3 hitter popped out weakly for the second out.

Justin Smoak walked when Milone was wide with a 3-2 pitch to force in Ryan. Montero then broke it open with an inside-out swing that dropped a liner down the right-field line and scored a pair. Smoak was thrown out at the plate trying to score from first.

"I just want to help the team. Whatever opportunity they give me, I'm going to help," Montero said. "I'm here to hit, I'm here to catch, whatever they decide, I'm going to help and do my best."

Although he was somewhat overlooked in the framework of the trade, Seattle's management was just as excited about bringing Noesi over from New York. He was knocked around in his first start for Seattle, giving up six hits and seven earned runs in just three innings against Texas. But back in a more pitcher-friendly park, Noesi flustered the A's and induced popups and flyouts most of the night. Of the 24 outs Noesi recorded, nine popups were caught by infielders and another five fly balls were caught by outfielders.

He was successful at getting his fastball in on batters, leading to the high number of weak popups. Noesi scattered hits to Daric Barton, Josh Reddick and a pair to Cliff Pennington. He ran into trouble with two outs in the eighth when Pennington's second hit was followed by Jemile Weeks' ground-rule double to center. Despite being at 104 pitches, Noesi stayed in and got Coco Crisp to pop out to end the inning.

"He pounded the strike zone," Oakland's Kurt Suzuki said. "He had it run a little bit, he threw changeups in there. He just threw very well."

NOTES: Seattle LHP George Sherrill has not received MRI results on his sore left elbow but said it started bothering him after the Mariners returned from Japan. Sherrill was placed on the 15-day disabled list Friday with a strained flexor bundle. ... A's manager Bob Melvin said he would announce Oakland's No. 5 starter on Sunday. Because of schedules, the A's have not needed a fifth starter until Tuesday's game at the Angels.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

CARTER LEADS CATS PAST ACES, 4-3

West Sacramento, Calif. - First baseman Chris Carter led the River Cats to a 4-3 victory over the Reno Aces with a third inning go-ahead two-run home run, his first of the year.

Reno got out to an early lead scoring once in the top of the first on three-straight singles from infielder Cody Ransom, outfielder Cole Gillespie and infielder Randy Ruiz. Sacramento responded in the bottom of the second inning with back-to-back doubles from catcher Derek Norris and infielder Adam Rosales. Prior to that, Sacramento had gone 19-straight innings without scoring a run after being shut out in two-straight games for the first time since 2009.

The score remained tied until Carter came to the plate in the bottom of the third inning, following a single from outfielder Grant Green. Carter took the first pitch from Aces lefty Tom Layne for a ball then sent the next one over the wall in left-center field, scoring two and giving Sacramento the 3-1 advantage. The River Cats tacked on another run in the fifth when Norris singled home Carter. Reno came back in the top of the seventh inning when they scored twice off of right-handed reliever Neil Wagner. Aces second baseman Taylor Harbin scored in a wild pitch from Wagner and outfielder A.J. Pollock doubled home shortstop Tommy Manzella. They would not score again, however, and ultimately fell to the Cats, 4-3.

Carter finished the game going 1-for-3 with a walk, two runs scored and two RBIs. Green and Norris had two hits each and each scored a run. Outfielder Michael Taylor went 1-for-4 with his second stolen base in as many days.

Sacramento's left-handed starting pitcher Fabio Castro went five innings, allowing just four hits, one walk and one earned run with five strikeouts. Righty Evan Scribner earned his first save of the season with a perfect ninth inning.

Gillespie and Ransom each had two hits for the Aces. Left-handed pitcher Tom Layne went 4.1 innings with eight hits, four earned runs, two walks and three strikeouts.

The two teams will meet again at Raley Field on Sunday at 1:05 p.m. River Cats right-handed pitcher Travis Banwart (1-0, 9.58 ERA) will take on Reno righty Barry Enright (1-0, 1.54 ERA).

To purchase 2012 Sacramento River Cats Season Tickets, Mini-Plans and group outings, call the River Cats Ticket Hotline at (916) 371-HITS (4487) or visit www.rivercats.com. In their first 12 seasons, the River Cats have won two Triple-A championships, four Pacific Coast League championships and 10 Pacific South Division championships. No other major American sports team has won 10 division titles in that span.

Smith and Haviland Carry Hounds To Series Win

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

A three-run first inning and a "piggy-back" start pushed the RockHounds to a 3-2 win over the Arkansas Travelers Saturday night at Citibank Ballpark in the finale of a three-game series.

The RockHounds set the table in the first with a Conner Crumbliss walk and a pair outstanding at bats from Josh Horton and Michael Choice, both of whom singled after getting behind in the count, 0-2. Shane Peterson ripped a two-run double into the left field corner to give the 'Hounds a 2-0 lead and Anthony Aliotti capped the scoring with an RBI single. The run, Aliotti's third RBI in two games, would be the team's last of the game and the game winner.

Murphy Smith and Shawn Haviland did the rest in what is called a "piggy-back start." On April 8 at Springfield, Missouri, Haviland started and Smith, by design, followed in relief in a 13-5 loss. The roles were reversed Saturday, and the result was a combined three-hitter.

Smith went the first 6.0 innings, with Arkansas manufacturing two runs utilizing one double, one walk, one steal, one wild pitch, one sacrifice fly and two ground outs. The right-hander allowed a total of two hits and four walks while striking out two.

Haviland then came out of the bullpen to earn the first save of his pro career going three shutout innings. He allowed three base runners (hit, walk, hit batsman) with one more batter reaching on an error, but struck out four and got a key double play to hang on to the one-run lead.

- Crumbliss, the 'Hounds' lead-off hitter, went 3-for-7 with five walks in the series (reaching base in 8-of-12 trips to the plate).

- The RockHounds (5-4) took two-of-three from Arkansas, staying one game behind first place Frisco (6-3) in the Texas League South.

- The Springfield Cardinals now come to Citibank Ballpark for a three-game series, completing the cross-division play that covers the first dozen games of the season. First pitch Sunday is at four o'clock.

Head's Homer Lifts Ports Past Nuts 4-2

STOCKTON, Calif. - One swing of the bat decided Saturday night's contest between the Stockton Ports and Modesto Nuts. With the score tied 1-1 in the seventh, Miles Head drove a towering three-run homer over the left field fence to give the Ports a 4-1 lead, and ultimately a 4-2 victory at Banner Island Ballpark.

In a game that began as a pitcher's duel, Ports starter T.J. Walz and Nuts starter Christian Bergman each worked for scoreless frames.

Modesto would draw first blood in the top of the fifth. Chandler Laurent led off the frame with a double and would eventually score on a sac-fly from Tim Smalling to give the Nuts a 1-0 lead.

The Ports would counter in the bottom half of the inning. With two outs, Michael Gilmartin doubled to right and scored on an ensuing RBI single from Josh Whitaker to knot the score at 1-1.

Walz would go six innings for the Ports, allowing one run on four hits while striking out three.

Bergman went 5.1 innings, allowing one run on five hits while striking out five.

The Ports broke through with the game's deciding runs in the seventh. With Nuts reliever Nick Schnaitmann (0-1) on the hill, Gilmartin and Whitaker knocked back-to-back one out singles. Head followed with a three-run homer to left that gave the Ports a 4-1 lead.

Schnaitmann would take the loss, allowing three runs on four hits in 1.2 innings of relief.

The Nuts got a run back in the top of the eighth on a two-out RBI single from Bryce Massanari off Ports reliever Nate Long, an unearned run for Long as it came following a fielding error made by third baseman Tony Thompson.

Zack Thornton (SV, 2) would come on for the ninth and pick up his second save of the season, pitching around a two-out hit batsman and retiring Snelling, the possible-tying run, on a fielder's choice groundout.

The Ports and Nuts will play the finale of their four-game set on Sunday at Banner Island Ballpark. Right-hander Blake Hassebrock (1-0, 1.42 ERA) will head to the mound for Stockton, opposed by Nuts right-hander Juan Gonzalez (0-1, 3.60 ERA). First pitch is set for 2:09 p.m. PDT.

Rain Delays a Bees Loss

By Daniel Trivinos / Burlington Bees

BURLINGTON, Iowa - The Burlington Bees never found their offense in a 6-2 loss to the Kane County Cougars. Those in attendance dealt with a rain delay that came in the bottom of the seventh, but ultimately watched a losing effort.

The Bees sent Raul Alcantara to the mound to start the game and Alcantara looked wild. In fact, Alcantara loaded the bases without giving up a hit in the top of the first. He managed to get two outs without the Cougars scoring until Henry Moreno

got his first hit of the season. Moreno's double plated two runs for the Cougars and at the end of one inning, the Bees trailed by two runs.

The top of the second wasn't kind to Alcantara either, as he gave up three hits and an RBI sacrifice fly to give the Cougars a 5-0 lead. Alcantara finished his outing after the fourth; over four innings, the right-hander gave up seven hits and five earned runs. Alcantara also struck out four in the loss.

The Bees scored one run in the bottom of the third after Douglas Landaeta reached first with a one-out walk. Landaeta took second base on a wild pitch and with two outs; Sean Jamieson lofted the Bees' first hit into right that allowed Landaeta to score.

In the bottom of the seventh with John Nester at the plate, the weather took a turn for the worst. Rain quickly fell onto the field and several bolts of lightning lit the sky beyond the outfield wall. The game went into a rain delay that lasted just over an hour. When play resumed, Nester finished his at bat with a walk and later scored in the inning.

Right-hander, Drew Tyson replaced Brent Powers to start the eighth. The rain delay couldn't have come at a worse time since Powers looked great again for the Bees. He pitched three innings and struck out three while not allowing a run. The score was 5-2 in the Cougars' favor before Kane County scored again in the top of the eighth with Tyson on the mound.

The Bees couldn't create another ninth inning comeback and instead went three-up, three-down to end the game.

Tomorrow night the Bees play the finale of the four game series with Kane County. Right-hander, Sean Murphy will start for the Bees. Murphy previously pitched five innings of one-hit ball for the Bees.

For tickets, call (319)_754-5705 or visit www.gobees.com for more information.