

A's News Clips, Friday, April 20, 2012

Oakland A's have surprise for Los Angeles Angels, win three of four

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

One team walked off the field licking its wounds Thursday night at Angel Stadium.

Just not the one you might have expected when this series began.

The A's, who arrived here having bumbled last weekend's series in Seattle, reversed their course and took three of four from the Los Angeles Angels, viewed by many as the favorites to win the American League West.

A 4-2 victory Thursday not only clinched the A's a winning record on their seven-game road trip, it moved them to .500 on the season at 7-7.

Raise your hand if you saw this coming back on Monday, when the A's were blanked 6-0 in the series opener to lose their third straight.

"After losing two of three in Seattle, lose the first game here and to come back to win the next three, it shows a little bit about how tough these guys are," A's manager Bob Melvin said.

The A's staged a morale-boosting eighth-inning rally to win Tuesday, and they received a sterling pitching effort from Bartolo Colon on Wednesday. They managed to win Thursday despite being outhit 10-3, due in large part to a clutch effort from their bullpen.

Five pitchers combined on four shutout innings after starter Tommy Milone (2-1) made it through just five innings.

"The bullpen came in and shut the door," Milone said.

The A's got an RBI double from Kurt Suzuki -- the latest Athletic to fall ill -- and a run-scoring single from Kila Ka'aihue. From there, they let the Angels -- who fell to 4-9 -- shoot themselves in the foot.

Starting pitcher C.J. Wilson -- making his home debut for the Angels -- committed the biggest mistake, throwing wildly to first base on Seth Smith's comebacker in the fourth that allowed Yoenis Cespedes and Jonny Gomes to score on the play.

That was part of a three-run rally that gave the A's a 4-0 lead.

Los Angeles answered with two runs off Milone in the bottom of the fourth.

But Oakland's bullpen kept things in check.

Fautino De Los Santos put runners on the corners to start the sixth, but Jordan Norberto pulled an escape job to keep it a 4-2 game.

Ryan Cook, Brian Fuentes and closer Grant Balfour shut the door from there.

"We've got a lot of confidence," Norberto said of the team as a whole. "We're in a good position right now."

Milone, like Wilson, hails from Southern California, and he was pitching his first game in the area since his collegiate days at USC. Milone gave up just the two runs but ran his pitch count up and lasted just five innings. He still pocketed his second victory.

The A's entered the night leading the league in stolen bases with 11, surprising considering leadoff man Jemile Weeks and No. 2 hitter Coco Crisp had just three steals combined. "We're trying to take advantage of the opportunities when they're given to us," Melvin said. Crisp, who missed his second straight game with the flu, Cespedes and Cliff Pennington each have two stolen bases, while Josh Donaldson, Josh Reddick, Gomes, Smith and Weeks all have one.

First baseman Brandon Allen was claimed off waivers by the Tampa Bay Rays. The A's designated Allen for assignment April 9, and they had until Thursday to trade him, release him or send him to the minors if he slipped through waivers. "He's such a great person," Melvin said. "You wish the best for people like that. He's really a talented guy. He just needs a chance to settle in somewhere and work through some (hitting) struggles."

A's: Are they getting closer to the South Bay?

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

A's co-owner Lew Wolff hinted Thursday that Major League Baseball might be attempting to broker an agreement between his team and the Giants to settle territorial rights regarding the city of San Jose.

Wolff's comments came in light of MLB commissioner Bud Selig saying that the A's and Tampa Bay Rays both need new stadiums in order to be competitive.

The A's want to build a new ballpark in downtown San Jose, but the Giants own the territorial rights to Santa Clara County and are strongly opposed to the A's moving there.

"I think he's right," Wolff said of Selig's comments. "I think he's focused on trying to work out something with us and the Giants. I'm happy to hear he's saying that."

Wolff declined to comment when asked directly if there were discussions currently taking place with the Giants. But until Thursday, he had been slow to even acknowledge the idea of possible negotiations between the teams.

The Giants' rights to San Jose could be overturned if 75 percent of baseball's team owners voted in favor of it. The next owners' meetings are scheduled for May 16-17 in New York, but the A's stadium issue is not expected to be an agenda item.

The speculation is that the A's could also strike a financial settlement with the Giants that allows them to move to San Jose.

Selig, speaking to the Associated Press Sports Editors on Thursday, said he recently met with both clubs but did not give a timetable for any resolution.

"I'm always hopeful when there are debates amongst clubs," Selig said. "I try to lead teams in a direction of solving their problems themselves. ... We've had a lot of meetings, spent an enormous amount of time. I've just met with both clubs again and we'll continue along this process."

Selig did not mince words about the A's needing to move from the Oakland Coliseum.

"The last time I was there -- I probably shouldn't say this, but I'll say it anyway -- it reminded me of County Stadium and Shea Stadium," he said. "And that's not a compliment, in either case. ... You can't ask people to compete if they have a stadium that doesn't produce any kind of revenue to give them a chance to compete."

Wolff was asked if he would re-consider other potential stadium locations other than in San Jose.

"No," he replied. "We don't see any options available. (But) the committee of baseball is really the one that should be answering that question."

Selig formed a committee in March 2009 to research the A's stadium options in the Bay Area, with no findings made public yet.

Andy Dolich -- a sports business consultant who has held high-ranking executive positions with the A's, 49ers and Warriors -- wrote an opinion piece for the San Jose Mercury News recently in which he predicted Oakland is the best place for the A's to build a new stadium.

Inside the Oakland A's: Postgame notes as A's close out a winning series in Anaheim

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Three wins in three days, and the A's are returning home after a 4-3 road trip that lifted them to .500 for the season. Here's a few items that didn't make it into my story for tomorrow's paper ...

—Keep Albert Pujols out of RBI situations and you've got a much better chance of beating the Angels. Their marquee offseason addition went 6 for 13 in the series and had three doubles Thursday, but he had zero RBIs over the four games. That's largely because Pujols batted with nobody on base in 13 of his 17 plate appearances in the series. The slugger is still looking for his first homer of 2012.

—What will the A's do about their third base situation? Josh Donaldson is struggling big-time. He's in a 2 for 29 slump and has 13 strikeouts in 32 at-bats this season. He also made a throwing error for the second straight game. The A's are slated

to face five right-handers in a row starting Friday, so I'd expect to see lots of Eric Sogard over the next few days. But longer term? That's a bigger question.

"It's performance-based in the big leagues," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "At some point in time, you've gotta swing the bat."

–The A's received a tremendous effort from their bullpen Thursday, especially from Jordan Norberto, who inherited a no-out situation with runners on the corners and didn't allow a run. Melvin noted how the back end of the bullpen — Grant Balfour, Brian Fuentes and Ryan Cook — are set, but the middle relievers are still sorting themselves out. So Melvin was very encouraged by Norberto's outing.

It wasn't quite so smooth for Fautino De Los Santos, who fired two pitches to the backstop over the two batters he faced.

–The A's will try to keep it going during a three-game series at home against the Cleveland Indians starting Friday.

That's all for now ...

Inside the Oakland A's: Coco Crisp still sick, out of lineup again as A's try to take series vs. Angels

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Here's the lineups for tonight's series finale in Anaheim. A win would give the A's a winning road trip and pull them to .500 overall for the season ...

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

Angels: Izturis 3B, Kendrick 2B, Pujols 1B, Hunter RF, Wells LF, Trumbo DH, Iannetta C, Aybar SS, Bourjos CF; Wilson LHP.

–Coco Crisp is still under the weather, so he's out of the lineup for the second straight night. Kurt Suzuki is also sick, but he's well enough to play ...

A's beat Angels, show signs of life on the road

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Anaheim -- Oakland's first road trip of the 2012 season might be cause for a little fan optimism.

The club has not fared well away from home in each of the previous five seasons, but this past week, the A's put together a winning road trip that included three victories against one of the division favorites, the Angels, and one over Seattle's Felix Hernandez.

On Thursday night at Angel Stadium, the A's pulled ahead 4-0 in the fourth inning, helped by C.J. Wilson's two-run throwing error. They held off the Angels for a 4-2 win with some particularly snappy work by relievers Jordan Norberto and Ryan Cook in the sixth and seventh innings.

"We've got a lot of confidence," Norberto said. "The hitters are seeing the ball really well and we're putting everything together, bullpen, starting pitching. I think we're in a good position now to keep our heads up, do our job and try to compete."

Wilson, the former Texas starter, remains a disliked figure among A's fans after he ripped Oakland and even the Coliseum mound last season. He gave up a two-out RBI double to Kurt Suzuki in the second inning.

In the fourth, Wilson walked the first two batters, then fielded Seth Smith's swinging bunt and lobbed it past Albert Pujols at first. That allowed both runners to score and Smith to go to second; Smith scored on Kila Ka'aihue's base hit to center.

Tommy Milone, a USC alum pitching in Southern California for the first time in his big-league career, allowed two runs in the fourth, but that was all during his five innings of work.

Fautino De Los Santos took the mound in the sixth and the Angels put the first two men on against him. Norberto replaced De Los Santos and got a forceout, a strikeout and another grounder.

"The bullpen was terrific," manager Bob Melvin said, "especially Norberto."

Cook had two on with one out in the seventh, and, hitting 100 mph on the stadium radar at least once, he got a flyball and strikeout to get out of it. Brian Fuentes and Grant Balfour worked scoreless innings, and Balfour earned his fourth save.

After signing Pujols (no homers in 13 games) and Wilson in the offseason for a total of \$323.5 million, the Angels were expected to challenge for the pennant, but instead they have a 4-9 record and there have been some signs of worry.

"I'm very disappointed in the way we're playing," Angels right fielder Torii Hunter told the Los Angeles Times on Wednesday. "I know it's only 12 games, but we can't keep saying that, because there's a way to lose, and we're not losing the right way. If you're going to lose, you've got to lose battling."

A's third baseman Josh Donaldson went 0-for-3 and is batting .094.

"He's shown some mettle at third but he's struggling at the plate, struggling mightily," Melvin said. "At some point in time, you have to swing the bat. He knows that."

The flu kept left fielder Coco Crisp out of the lineup for the second night in a row.

Still buzzing over A's Bartolo Colon

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Anaheim -- **Bartolo Colon's** 38 consecutive strikes Wednesday night - possibly a record - was still a hot topic Thursday at Angel Stadium.

Marvin Hudson, the home-plate umpire for Colon's strike extravaganza, said in an interview with The Chronicle that, like Colon, he was unaware of the streak while it was unfolding.

"I really didn't know," Hudson said. "I was just calling pitches as they were thrown. I didn't realize until I saw it on the news (Thursday) morning.

"Both pitchers were working well, throwing strikes, the game was moving quickly. I knew we didn't get many 3-2 counts, but I just call 'em where they throw 'em."

Now that he's aware of the feat? "It's pretty incredible, 38 in a row," Hudson said, adding, "Being around the plate is nice."

A's starter **Brandon McCarthy**, a connoisseur of pitching and of numbers, said that the 38 strikes in a row weren't what was astonishing to him: "It's the not giving up any runs during it, against that lineup, in this ballpark," he said. "To have that kind of control of the game: When he was in the zone, they were taking it. When he was out of the zone, they were swinging at it. That's a pitcher's dream. That was masterful."

Going unnoticed, McCarthy pointed out, was the work Colon did setting the stage. The string of strikes came from innings five through eight, but, McCarthy said, "Credit his first four innings, what he was doing to set that up, then pitching backward."

Elias Sports Bureau has pitch-by-pitch data going back only to 1988, and Colon's was the longest since then (**Tim Wakefield** had 30 in a row in 1998) but no one could remember a longer streak of strikes before that.

Allen goes to Rays: First baseman **Brandon Allen**, designated for assignment last week, was claimed by Tampa Bay on Thursday.

"He's such a great person," said manager **Bob Melvin**, who sent Allen a text congratulating him on his new opportunity. "You wish the best for people like that."

Kila Ka'aihue, retained as the A's backup first baseman, has hit safely in all five of his starts and had an RBI single Thursday.

A's on deck

Friday

vs. Indians

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

Jimenez (1-0) vs. Godfrey (0-2)

Saturday

vs. Indians

6:05 p.m. **CSN+**

Gomez (0-0) vs. McCarthy (0-2)

Sunday

vs. Indians

1:05 p.m. **CSNCA**

Masterson (0-1) vs. Ross (0-0)

Leading off

Exclusive club: Yoenis Céspedes was left off the AL Home Run Derby ballot. On it: Jose Bautista, Miguel Cabrera, Robinson Cano, Prince Fielder, Josh Hamilton, Paul Konerko, Evan Longoria, David Ortiz, Albert Pujols and Mark Reynolds.

The Drumbeat: A's end winning road trip by beating Angels three times in row

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Angel Stadium, 4/20/2012, 12:05am

Road life hasn't appealed much to the A's the past five years, with zero winning records away from home in that time, but this "first" road trip (Tokyo was "home games") was a good one for the A's. They started it by beating Felix Hernandez at Seattle, then they bounced back from three straight losses by taking three in a row from the Angels. So Oakland had a winning road trip, going 4-3, and the A's are back to .500 at 7-7.

The Angels are 4-9 after their \$323 million spending spree last winter. There's some consternation here in SoCal.

Tonight, C.J. Wilson's throwing error helped the A's to three runs in the fourth inning – he'd walked two men before his "changeup" to Albert Pujols, and both of them scored. Seth Smith, who tapped the swinging bunt Wilson threw away, then came in on Kila Ka'aihue's base hit to center.

I know many of you will be heartbroken at Wilson's rough inning, considering his "Oakland sucks" comments of last year. It's nice he's stayed in the division so everyone at the Coliseum can remind him of their fondness for him often.

The standout performer for Oakland tonight might have been reliever Jordan Norberto. He came in in the sixth with two men on and nobody out (Fautino De Los Santos' doing) and he calmly got a forceout, a strikeout and another force.

"I just try to do my job," he said. "Throw strikes and let it happen, try to control the running game and make the game slow."

Throwing strikes was the tough part for Norberto up until now, but the scouting report always was that once he settled down and consistently was in the zone, he'd be an excellent reliever. Josh Donaldson played with Norberto during winter ball, and he told me the first day of spring training that Norberto was going to be the surprise of the team this year, because he was so fantastic in the Dominican Republic.

Manager Bob Melvin said the bullpen is set in the seventh, eighth and ninth with setup men Ryan Cook (also impressive tonight) and Brian Fuentes and closer Grant Balfour, but it's the innings before that that can be a challenge. He was very happy with Norberto's work, and I believe we can safely assume we'll see Norberto in most tricky mid-innings situations now.

Ka'aihue has hit safely in all five of his starts and he has a .421 average overall – will that win him more time at first base?

Donaldson, who got the night off Wednesday, went 0-for-3 and he is batting .094. I asked Melvin about his plans at third base given Donaldson's struggles, and he said he'll keep mixing Eric Sogard in, and I believe that means soon. Of Donaldson's hitting woes, Melvin said, "He's shown some mettle at third but he's struggling at the plate, struggling mightily. At some point in time, you have to swing the bat. He knows that."

The Drumbeat: Brandon Allen claimed by Rays; A's still have a flu-bug circulating

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Angel Stadium, 4/19/2012, 6:09pm

This probably was to be expected: Tampa Bay claimed Brandon Allen on waivers today. The odds were good that another club was going to pick up the first baseman once the A's designated him for assignment last week.

"We hoped to keep Brandon in the organization, but obviously knew the risk once we designated him," assistant general manager David Forst said in an email. "As we've seen in the past, all it takes is one team out of 29 to claim a guy. For Brandon's sake, hopefully he'll find a good opportunity in Tampa."

I think the remaining image many people will have of Allen in an A's uniform is those monster homers he hit at Yankee Stadium last year. At the time, I thought, "Wow, the A's might finally have a corner infielder with some good power," but as it turned out, Allen just wasn't consistent enough. He had a good spring, and at times appeared as if he might really be in the running for the starting job.

As it turned out, the job was Daric Barton's all along, now that he is back to full health. But I'll never forget those blasts in New York. Impressive!

Manager Bob Melvin said he had mixed feelings – he's sorry to see Allen go, but on a personal level, he's happy for Allen.

"He's such a great person," Melvin said. "You wish the best for people like that. He works so hard, he's a great teammate, he just needs to settle in."

Melvin exchanged texts with Allen today and congratulated him on his new opportunity. Tampa Bay has a very good club – that could wind up a very nice spot for Allen if he's what they're looking for.

Coco Crisp remains out with the flu, Josh Reddick is feeling much better and Kurt Suzuki is a little under the weather. Reddick and Suzuki are both in the lineup, and Suzuki told me he's OK. As Melvin said, he's a catcher. They're tough.

Here's the lineup: Weeks 2B, Pennington SS, Reddick RF, Cespedes CF, Gomes LF, Smith DH, Suzuki C, Ka'aihue 1B, Donaldson 3B, Milone P.

I asked Melvin about Jamie Moyer and his win the other night. Moyer was in Melvin's rotation in Seattle, and he's also just a year younger than the A's manager.

"I think it's pretty phenomenal," Melvin said. "You look at how hard he's throwing, and he's always been able to create the gap between his fastball and changeup, even now if he's throwing 78-79, the changeup is probably 68-69 mph.

"It's not a sideshow. He wouldn't take anyone time up if he didn't think he could be productive."

Bud Selig told the AP Sports Editors today the A's and Rays need new ballparks. This is certainly not news, nor is Lew Wolff's response to me when I asked him about Selig's statement: "I agree we need a new ballpark." But the A's definitely do not mind keeping this issue front and center in the public eye. The more attention, the better, as far as the A's are concerned.

Opportunistic A's take third straight from Halos

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- A's fans surely aren't too fond of C.J. Wilson, not after the pitcher ripped them last year.

But Wilson just might have won them back, at least for one night anyway.

Now an Angel, the southpaw proved rather gracious during his six innings on the mound Thursday, which included his own throwing error that led to two runs, half of the A's final total in their third straight win, a 4-2 decision that secured them the series victory in Anaheim.

It was just last May when Wilson accused the A's of playing "lawyer ball," complaining that their hitters don't swing, and instead let the umpires decide the game. His comments, of course, came on the heels of a four-walk outing in a loss to Oakland.

On Thursday, Wilson issued three free passes, and all three runners scored. In fact, the A's ended their night with as many walks as hits, a reflection of an unproven offense that will have to rely on multiple ways to cross home plate this season.

Oakland's first walk was awarded to Seth Smith in the second, and Kurt Suzuki quickly capitalized on the opportunity with an RBI double to give the A's an early 1-0 advantage. An unraveled Wilson helped Oakland extend that lead to four in the fourth, when he issued consecutive walks to Yoenis Cespedes and Jonny Gomes, before making an errant throw on Smith's ensuing ground ball that brought home two runs.

"C.J.'s tough on us, and it's nice to finally break through and beat him," manager Bob Melvin said. "We had to do it in a little bit of an unorthodox fashion. That was the key play of the game. It gave us some momentum, and we were able to hold on with good pitching."

"It was a fairly easy play," Wilson said. "I just tried to make an easy throw, but I took it too easy and threw it short. It wasn't a short-arm, it was just kind of a changeup, just tried to lob it in there. It just didn't get there."

The A's weren't done, as Wilson proceeded to offer up a one-out RBI base hit to Kila Ka'aihue.

It was just four days ago the A's departed Seattle having dropped two of the first three games of their first road trip, making the series in Southern California appear all the more daunting, given the threat that is a well-built Angels team. But Los Angeles has appeared anything but in the early going, allowing Oakland to snag three wins and return to the Bay Area with a 4-3 road showing.

The A's are 7-7, while the Angels are 4-9 and seven games back of division-leading Texas.

"To come in and beat this team after losing two of three in Seattle, and to lose the first game here and come back and win the next three, it shows how tough some of these guys are," Melvin said. "We had illnesses and a lot of things going against us, but to take three, we'll take it every time."

Starter Tommy Milone, pitching in front of nearly 60 friends and family members, wasn't at his best, particularly in a 31-pitch fourth inning that resulted in two Angels runs, but that's all he would allow over the course of five frames, before handing the ball over to a bullpen that stole the show.

Right-hander Fautino De Los Santos struggled in the sixth, putting runners on first and third with no outs for Jordan Norberto, who garnered three quick outs without allowing a run to score.

And in the seventh, with Ryan Cook on the mound, Albert Pujols hit a one-out double -- his third of the night -- and Torii Hunter walked behind him, but Cook got Vernon Wells to fly out lazily to right field, then struck out Mark Trumbo to keep the Angels off the board again.

Brian Fuentes pitched a scoreless eighth frame, and Grant Balfour did the same in the ninth, securing his fourth save in as many opportunities.

"The bullpen was terrific," Melvin said. "We feel like we have a pretty good handle on who our 7-8-9 guys are going to be, but it's when we have the lead before that time, when we're still trying to figure things out. But Norberto was terrific. That was as good a performance as we had today."

The left-hander kept it simple.

"Just try to do my job, throw strikes and let it happen," Norberto said. "Try to control the running game and slow the game down. We gotta be ready for any situation. That's going to happen sometimes. We have to be prepared."

Added Milone: "They came in and just shut the door."

In doing so, the bullpen preserved Milone's second win. The young southpaw's ERA stands at a tidy 2.84 after three starts, his most recent being a memorable one.

"It feels great to come back home and pitch well," he said. "You want to pitch well for them and for the team. It's important to come back and, first game being able to pitch close to home, to do well and to get a win for the team and for the people that came out to support."

Allen claimed off waivers by Tampa Bay

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- Though Bob Melvin had hoped to retain Brandon Allen, the A's manager was happy to see the first baseman find another opportunity with the Rays.

Allen, who was designated for assignment by the A's on April 9 upon Daric Barton's reinstatement from the disabled list, was claimed off waivers by Tampa Bay on Thursday.

"I went back and forth with him a bit the past week," Melvin said. "I'm happy for him, and that's really the way I should look at it. He's such a great person. You wish the best for people like that, not only good people, but guys that work so hard and are great teammates. Really, he's a talented guy. He just needs a chance to settle in somewhere and work through some struggles."

Allen served as the A's Opening Day starter at first base, but went hitless in seven at-bats over three games following a busy spring campaign that saw him hit .314 with two home runs and 14 RBIs in 14 contests. The 26-year-old was acquired by the A's from Arizona at the Trade Deadline last year and, according to Melvin, "seemed happy" about his new home.

The Rays, it seems, are more than happy to have him.

"I heard he's a great guy," Tampa Bay manager Joe Maddon said. "I heard he's an 80 makeup guy, which is the highest grade you can give an athlete."

Crisp misses second straight game with flu

ANAHEIM -- Still recovering from the flu, Coco Crisp was missing from action for a second straight day Thursday, as manager Bob Melvin fielded his 11th different lineup of the season.

"Coco's still struggling," Melvin said. "He's definitely got it the worst. I guess there are different degrees of it, but I guess Coco's the one who hasn't gotten any better."

Catcher Kurt Suzuki, who was also touched by the contagious bug, remained in the lineup for the finale against the Angels, while Josh Reddick resumed right-field duties one day after transferring to the designated hitter spot as a result of being slightly under the weather.

"It's like kindergarten," joked Melvin, who has been carrying around a bottle of Purell sanitizer in his back pocket. "Wash your hands, do the best you can."

With Crisp still sidelined, Jonny Gomes received his second straight start in left field. The A's veteran hit his third homer of the season -- which have accounted for all of his hits -- on Wednesday.

The A's 12 long balls in their first 13 games are the most since 2006, when they hit 17.

Worth noting

- The A's pitching staff tossed its third shutout of the season Wednesday, which is tied with the Giants for the Major League lead.

Oakland's offense has also been shut out three times, most in the Majors. There have been 13 shutouts in the American League this year, and the A's have been involved in six of them.

Riding three-game win streak, A's welcome Tribe

Godfrey set to square off against Jimenez in series opener

By Quinn Roberts / MLB.com

Heading back to the friendly confines of the Oakland Coliseum on Friday to square off against the Indians, the A's hope they are leaving the flu-bug behind.

With several players beaten down by a cold during their seven-game road trip, including Coco Crisp -- who's missed Oakland's last two games -- everyone on the team is being as careful as possible to make sure it doesn't spread.

"It's like kindergarten," joked manager Bob Melvin, who has been carrying around a bottle of Purell sanitizer in his back pocket. "Wash your hands, do the best you can."

Weirdly enough, the germs have the A's playing some great baseball, with the team taking three of four games from the Angels.

Graham Godfrey will attempt to keep that going for the A's and notch his first win of the season.

Riding a four-game losing streak that goes back to last season, Godfrey took the loss Sunday against the Mariners after giving up three earned runs on six hits in five innings.

Godfrey will be up against Indians ace Ubaldo Jimenez, who will try and bounce back after a rough outing Sunday against the Royals.

While the right-hander surrendered four runs on nine hits in five innings of work, he took the no-decision after Cleveland scored 13 runs on 15 hits.

"The first three innings, it was hard to get in a good rhythm," Jimenez said. "I didn't have command with my fastball."

It'll also be up to Jimenez to keep the Indians on a hot streak that has seen them go 5-1 so far on a nine-game road trip.

"We've got a winning road trip. Obviously, we want to win more in Oakland, but we're already coming off a successful road trip," closer Chris Perez said after Thursday's 2-1 comeback win against the Mariners. "Oakland is going to be another tough series. They pitch it really well. Execution and small plays are going to be big."

Indians: Acta not worried about Hannahan's errors

Indians manager Manny Acta isn't worried too much about the fact that third baseman Jack Hannahan has committed a handful of errors early on this season. Acta still believes his reputation as a strong defender remains intact.

"He's just making them all early," Acta said with a shrug. "It's not like now all of a sudden he's not going to be a good defensive player."

Hannahan, who is in his second season as Cleveland's starting third baseman, had committed four errors so far this season.

A's: Allen claimed off waivers

Brandon Allen, who was designated for assignment by the A's on April 9 after Daric Barton's reinstatement from the disabled list, was claimed off waivers by Tampa Bay on Thursday.

"I went back and forth with him a bit the past week," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "I'm happy for him, and that's really the way I should look at it. He's such a great person. You wish the best for people like that, not only good people, but guys that work so hard and are great teammates. Really, he's a talented guy. He just needs a chance to settle in somewhere and work through some struggles."

Allen served as the A's Opening Day starter at first base, but went hitless in seven at-bats over three games following a Spring Training that saw him hit .314 with two home runs and 14 RBIs in 14 contests.

Worth Noting

- Indians manager Manny Acta indicated that the current plan is to send lefty Nick Hagadone back to Triple-A Columbus

once shortstop Asdrubal Cabrera is activated from the bereavement list. Cabrera left the team on Tuesday to be with his family in Venezuela after the death of his grandfather. Hagadone was promoted, giving the Tribe eight relievers until the shortstop's return.

- The A's pitching staff tossed its third shutout of the season Wednesday, which is tied with the Giants for the Major League lead.

A's capitalize on errors, hold off slumping Angels

By GREG BEACHAM, Associated Press

Kurt Suzuki and Kila Ka'aihue drove in runs, Oakland scored two more on C.J. Wilson's throwing error in his home debut, and the Athletics beat the struggling Los Angeles Angels 4-2 Thursday night for their third straight victory.

Tommy Milone (2-1) allowed seven hits in five innings in his native Southern California to win the eighth start of his major league career as the Athletics took three of four from the big-budget Angels, who dropped to 4-9.

Albert Pujols had three doubles and missed his first homer for the Angels by just a few inches, sending a drive off the top of the left-field wall in the fifth. The \$240 million man extended his hitting streak to nine games with his first three-hit game for Los Angeles, although his career-worst homer drought to open a season stretched to 13 games.

Wilson (2-1) labored through six innings of two-hit ball in his home debut for the Angels, and his teammates also struggled. Vernon Wells and Mark Trumbo drove in runs, but Los Angeles stranded 11. Erick Aybar made two errors after receiving his Gold Glove trophy and signing his new \$35 million contract before the game.

Pujols reached on a one-out throwing error in the ninth, but Torii Hunter grounded into a game-ending double play. Grant Balfour earned his fourth save for Oakland.

The Angels have lost seven of nine, already falling seven games behind Texas in the AL West early in a season of sky-high expectations.

Milone grew up just north of Los Angeles and pitched three seasons at USC before signing with Washington, which traded him to Oakland. He had a small but vocal cheering section at Angel Stadium, but he nearly gave up Pujols' first homer with the Angels: After the three-time NL MVP missed by inches in the fifth, he slapped his hands together in obvious frustration at second base.

Wilson opened the season with two stellar road victories after signing a \$77.5 million deal to return to his native Orange County, but the left-hander wasn't impressive at home despite eight strikeouts. He needed 102 pitches to get through his first five innings, and his throwing error helped Oakland take a 4-0 lead.

After Suzuki drove a two-out double into the left-field corner in the second, Wilson created his own trouble in the fourth. He issued two leadoff walks and allowed both runners to score when his throw to first on Seth Smith's check-swing tapper skipped past Pujols. Yoenis Cespedes scored before Jonny Gomes, who flipped upside-down but got up smiling from his collision with Chris Iannetta.

Ka'aihue then drove in Smith for his first RBI with the A's.

The Angels finally got going later in the fourth with consecutive doubles from Pujols and Wells, followed by Trumbo's ferocious RBI single off the left-field wall.

Milone escaped jams in his final two innings, stranding two runners in each. Los Angeles stranded two more in the sixth and seventh against Oakland's bullpen.

NOTES: Aybar was bumped from the leadoff spot to eighth in manager Mike Scioscia's lineup after his .190 start to the season. Aybar went 2 for 4. ... Pujols was the first Angels hitter with three doubles in a game since Chone Figgins on Aug. 19, 2009. ... Milone's two teams are 7-1 in his eight career starts.

Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig says Oakland Athletics and Tampa Bay must get new ballparks

By Associated Press

NEW YORK — Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig insists the Oakland Athletics and Tampa Bay Rays must have new ballparks to be able to compete.

Speaking on Thursday to the Associated Press Sports Editors, Selig provided no timetable for deciding the Bay Area dispute between the A's, who would like to build a ballpark in San Jose, and the Giants, who won't give up their territorial rights there.

"I'm always hopeful when there are debates amongst clubs, I try to lead teams in a direction of solving their problems themselves," Selig said. "However, this group has an interesting comment whenever they get in trouble: 'That's why you're here, Commissioner.' That's what they tell me. I don't know that that's a particularly good answer. ... We've had a lot of meetings, spent an enormous amount of time. I've just met with both clubs again and we'll continue along this process."

Asked whether there could be a solution that wouldn't anger one of the Bay Area teams, Selig responded: "Time will tell. I'm always hopeful. I'm an optimist, and I really believe that every problem has a solution to it. The question is just finding the right one, and so far I've been lucky on that score. And so I hope my string of luck will continue."

He was clear, however, that he wants the A's to move from the Coliseum, their home since 1968 and the last stadium shared by baseball and the NFL.

"The one given everybody believes is that Oakland needs a new stadium," Selig said. "The last time I was there, I probably shouldn't say this, but I'll say it anyway, it reminded me of County Stadium and Shea Stadium, and that's not a compliment, in either case. ... You can't ask people to compete if they have a stadium that doesn't produce any kind of revenue to give them a chance to compete. So that's a given."

Twenty-four teams have opened ballparks since 1989, all but Boston (which celebrates the 100th anniversary of Fenway Park on Friday), the Chicago Cubs, the Los Angeles Angels and Dodgers, Oakland and Tampa Bay.

The Rays started play in Tropicana Field in 1998, eight years after it opened. Owner Stuart Sternberg announced plans in 2007 for a new ballpark with a retractable fabric roof, then abandoned the project over the next two years.

"They need a new ballpark, there's no question," Selig said. "I talked a lot to Stu Sternberg and he's talking to people. He and I have had many conversations, and we'll just monitor the situation. He's doing what he should do. He's there, he's talking to all parties trying to see what he can do."

Speaking about Florida's other team, Selig backed the Miami Marlins' five-game suspension of manager Ozzie Guillen for comments praising Cuban leader Fidel Castro.

"I was disappointed, very disappointed," Selig said about Guillen's remarks, adding that Guillen's apology will be judged by "time and future actions — they'll speak the loudest."

He didn't think Guillen's comments were analogous to inflammatory remarks by late Cincinnati owner Marge Schott and retired reliever John Rocker that earned longer suspensions.

"I thought the suspension and the way he was treated was penalty enough," Selig said.

Selig said baseball was making progress in negotiations with the incoming owners of the Los Angeles Dodgers for more information on the group's financing and ownership of the parking lots and land surrounding Dodger Stadium. Current owner Frank McCourt will keep an interest in the land.

"I know how people feel there, so you bet, I'm concerned with all ramifications, including the parking," Selig said.

As Selig spoke, new adviser Tony La Russa listened. La Russa, who retired as manager of the World Series champion St. Louis Cardinals after last season, was a member of Selig's study committee and said he originally opposed the new one-game, wild-card playoff but changed his mind.

"We were looking for a way to value the regular-season champion and make the wild-card team a little more or a lot more disadvantaged," he said.

Selig also said:

—he will soon announce the sites of the 2013 and 2014 All-Star games. MLB has long ago decided it wanted the 2013 game at the Mets' Citi Field and 2014 at Minnesota's Target Field

—revenue will exceed \$7 billion this year.

—baseball has not started checking into whether there are issues with the prescription painkiller Toradol.

—attendance is up about 4 percent so far this season.

—he wouldn't comment on Roger Clemens' perjury trial. "That is something Roger is going to have to face now. ... There's nothing I can say."

—of MLB's efforts to increase the percentage of African-American players: "progress like that doesn't come overnight."

A's Debate Oakland vs. San Jose For New Park

by Nina Thorsen, kqed

The San Francisco 49ers will hold a ceremonial groundbreaking for their new stadium Thursday. It's been years in the making, and one of the most controversial decisions the team made was to leave the city they're named for and locate almost 40 miles away, in Santa Clara. And they're not the only local sports franchise looking to head south. The owners of the Oakland A's would like them to become the San Jose A's.

These relocations are inspired not so much by the fan base or the availability of land, but by the proximity to corporations who are an increasingly important source of revenue. Baseball is changing from an escape from the workday world, to an extension of the office. Jeffrey August works in network engineering for Facebook. "I get asked to come to meetings that include a Giants game probably at least once a month during the baseball season," said August. "Since 2006, I think I've been to a total of two meetings at the Oakland Coliseum," he said.

This is distressing to August, a lifelong A's fan. He's also editor-at-large for the blog www.newballpark.org, which has been following the twists and turns of the A's stadium quest for the last seven years. August says the A's organization is way behind in terms of catering to business clients. "You don't attract corporations to come without some kind of corporate marketing arm," said August. "But other than a phone number to call and order tickets, I don't see the A's doing it. I don't see the A's out at a lot of events that you do see the Giants at, for instance." Even if the Coliseum's seats were filled with ordinary fans every night (which they're not) all ticket buyers are not created equal.

John Vrooman is a sports economist on the faculty of Vanderbilt University in Nashville. He says corporate clients are the most important ticket buyers. "It's true for the Sharks, it's true for the Warriors, it's true for the Raiders, and it's going to be true for the Athletics," Vrooman said. Corporate clients are valuable in sports because they commit to -- and pay for -- their season tickets and luxury suites months, or even years, in advance. And those sales don't depend on how well the team is playing, who the opponents are, or the weather at game time.

When Jeffrey August did [a series of blog posts](#) comparing the prospects for various stadium locations, he found proximity to the corporate market was San Jose's major competitive advantage. "Preselling tickets, getting corporations to sponsor sections of the stadium and put up signage... on almost every other measure, it's pretty even between Oakland and San Jose," August said.

Baseball fans usually don't like to think of the game as a business. But Chris Dobbins says the romantic and the economic view aren't incompatible. Dobbins sits on the board that oversees the Oakland Coliseum. He's also part of [Save Oakland Sports](#), a group which recently formed to try and keep the A's in Oakland, as well as the Raiders and the Warriors. "The economic reality is that for all of us fans in the bleachers yelling and screaming, the owners need the corporate money, the people buying the suites and high-priced suites as well."

Oakland advocates point out that the Coliseum has something no other stadium in the Bay Area has: its own BART station and its own Amtrak station. Dobbins says the freeway access to the site is also unparalleled. "But on the flip side, that's almost a hindrance," Dobbins said. "Because people don't see the beauty of Oakland; they just come in, go right to the Coliseum, and come out. There's no restaurants around there, there's no shopping."

To change that, Oakland's conceived a huge project -- a new ballpark for the A's, a separate football stadium for the Raiders, a new basketball arena for the Golden State Warriors, and more, on 750 acres between the Coliseum BART station and the Oakland Airport. The concept's called [Coliseum City](#). Oakland Assistant City Administrator Fred Blackwell explained the plan at a press conference last month: "It combines sports facilities with more commercial, more hospitality, and more entertainment uses. And the reason why that is important is because those are the kinds of things that are financeable in

the private market," said Blackwell. "We anticipate being able to substantially leverage private investment and debt in order to make that project move forward."

Critics say Coliseum City is just a pipe dream that has no chance to succeed, that will just delay the inevitable loss of the teams. But economist John Vrooman says don't write the East Bay off. "Oakland is just living the classic life cycle of an American city," he said. "And it doesn't end in death. It ends in rebirth. And the city evolves, and constantly, like a phoenix, it just comes back up from the ashes," said Vrooman. "This would be a good spot for it to happen."

Whether a new ballpark eventually happens in Oakland, San Jose, or someplace else, the long period of inaction has been costly -- for the A's owners, for the team's fans, and for the Bay Area as a whole. Peter Allen of San Jose is a Giants fan, but nevertheless, he recently wrote an open letter asking Giants owners to drop their objections to the A's moving south. "Because if it was in the best interests of baseball and the game and the sport and the fans," Allen said, "this would already be a done deal and we'd already have construction going on downtown, and we'd have people working," said Allen. "At a time when 11 percent of Silicon Valley is out of work, and 30 percent unemployment in the construction trades, we'd have people working on the stadium."

Major League Baseball owners have a meeting scheduled next month. The A's are reportedly trying to get their issue on the agenda. If MLB gave its approval, the next steps for San Jose would be acquiring the last pieces of land and holding a public referendum. Oakland already owns most of the Coliseum site and doesn't need a vote, but it's behind in terms of design and financing. In either city, Opening Day in a new ballpark is 2016, at the earliest.

A's take a go-slow approach to marketing slugger Cespedes

by Eric Young, San Francisco Business Times

Expectations are running high for Yoenis Cespedes, the outfielder who defected from Cuba and signed a \$36 million contract with the A's before this season.

He is exciting to watch. Cespedes has speed and range in the outfield. But what fans love about the guy is his power. He's already hit some moon shots.

Some analysts are expecting him to produce 20-25 home runs this season.

In short, he has all the material to be a central part of a major Athletics' marketing campaign geared toward boosting team attendance and getting the turnstiles clicking again at the Coliseum.

But the A's are taking a go-slow approach with their young player.

"Yes, we are beginning to integrate him into our marketing, though we are giving him a chance to get his feet on the ground in a new country, including learning a new language and getting comfortable with his teammates, the organization and his new home," said Jim Leahey, A's vice president of sales and marketing.

Cespedes is the featured player in the photo on the team's Spanish language pocket schedules and the club will put him on the cover of Athletics Magazine this summer.

But as for a big blow out promoting Cespedes, not yet.

The take-it-easy approach makes sense, said Bob Dorfman, a sports marketer with Baker Street Advertising. Not only does the club not want to overwhelm him, Cespedes' numbers need to improve before the A's can build a major campaign around him, Dorfman said.

Entering tonight's game, Cespedes struck out 17 times in 42 at bats, or 40 percent of the time. On the plus side, he leads the club in homers (4) and RBI (12).

Minor League News

Rainiers win 1-0, River Cats Lose Two Straight

West Sacramento, Calif. - The Sacramento River Cats were shut out for the third time in 2012 falling to the Tacoma Rainiers for the second night in a row by a score of 1-0.

Neither team was able to put a run across the board until Rainier catcher Guillermo Quiroz hit a solo home run off of Sacramento left-handed starting pitcher Fabio Castro in the top of the third inning.

The River Cats would put base runners in scoring position a few times including the bottom of the eighth inning. An error from Tacoma third baseman Vinnie Catricala put runners at second and third with two outs and first baseman Brandon Moss at the plate. The Rainiers called on lefty Oliver Perez to face the left-handed Moss, but Moss would ultimately go down looking at strike three.

Castro lost the game but went six innings, giving up six hits, three walks and one earned run with seven strikeouts. Right-handed reliever Justin Souza recorded two perfect innings with one strikeout and lefty Pedro Figueroa threw a scoreless ninth, allowing one walk and striking out one.

Tacoma's left-handed starter Anthony Vasquez gave up four hits, two walks and no runs with three strikeouts in 7.2 innings pitched, earning the win. Right-handed reliever Shawn Kelley earned the save with one scoreless inning of work.

Sacramento logged four hits in the contest. Outfielder Collin Cowgill, playing his first game with Sacramento since being optioned by the A's, went 1-for-4.

The two teams return to Raley Field for the fourth and final game of the series on Friday, April 20 at 7:05 p.m. River Cats right-handed pitcher Travis Banwart (1-0, 7.04 ERA) will start opposite Rainiers righty Jarrett Grube (0-0, 0.00) on Toyota Family Value Friday.

Midland's Gray calms down, wins first

By Jonathan Raymond / Special to MLB.com

One of Sonny Gray's favorite quotes is "Walk softly and carry a big stick." He interprets the famous Theodore Roosevelt line as a call to carry himself with a quiet confidence every time he takes the mound and let his pitches do the talking.

In his first two starts of 2012, Oakland's No. 4 prospect felt he'd let his excitement level get too high. On Thursday, though, he was back to walking softly.

Gray (1-1) allowed one run on four hits and a walk while striking out five over seven innings en route to his first win of the year as Midland topped San Antonio, 4-1.

The 22-year-old had allowed nine runs -- six earned -- in his previous two starts, but put it together against the Missions in an outing reminiscent of the success he had in his first professional exposure last season, when he sported a 0.45 ERA in 20 Texas League innings.

"I've been trying to curb my energy level. My excitement out there has been really high, but today I was a little more quiet," said the Vanderbilt University product. "I was just out there doing my thing, making my pitches and not getting too excited."

MLB.com's **No. 85 overall prospect** said he noticed San Antonio hitters swinging early and often as the game got underway.

"We figured out in the first two innings they were going to be super-aggressive, and then we tried to use that to our advantage," Gray said. "I tried to expand the zone on the first pitch and got a lot of weak contact that way. The two-seam fastball was running in on right-handers and they were swinging at it, and the breaking ball was there for me finally again. It hadn't kind of been there the first two outings, but it was there tonight."

The outing, Gray's longest in three starts, brought his ERA down to 3.50 in 18 innings to begin the season. The No. 18 pick in the 2011 Draft had walked six in his previous 11 innings, but issued just one free pass against the Missions.

The right-hander credited his calmer nerves and a solid defense behind him for the reversal of course after his first two outings.

"I just felt like I was getting more into my rhythm. I didn't try to do too much," he said. "They were making great plays behind me, sucking it up and throwing them out at first. All you can ask for is to get up there and give your team a chance to win. Hopefully, I can continue to do that."

The left side of the RockHounds' infield provided Gray with most of his run support. Shortstop Dusty Coleman collected three hits and drove in two of Midland's four runs, while third baseman Josh Horton added two doubles.

Stockton Blanked 4-0 In Modesto

MODESTO, Calif. - For the third time in four nights, the Stockton Ports failed to score a run. The Ports, held to just four hits, were blanked by the Modesto Nuts 4-0 at John Thurman Field in the opener of a four-game set.

Ports starter A.J. Cole (0-2) retired the first four batters he faced, and then gave up a single to Brett Tanos with one out in the second. Two batters later with two away, Dallas Tarleton tripled down the right field line to give the Nuts a 1-0 lead.

Cole, who struck out a season-high seven batters on the night, gave up another run in the fifth. With one out, Jayson Langfels doubled to left and Rafael Ortega followed with a single to center to give Modesto a 2-0 advantage.

Cole took the loss despite looking sharp, allowing a pair of runs on six hits. He didn't walk a batter on the night.

Meanwhile, Nuts starter Christian Bergman (1-1) was sensational. After allowing a one out double to A.J. Kirby-Jones in the second, Bergman retired the next 16 batters, taking him two outs deep into the seventh inning.

Trailing 2-0, the Ports got a leadoff double from Tony Thompson in the eighth, but couldn't get him across.

Bergman earned the win, tossing eight scoreless innings and allowing four hits while striking out four.

The Nuts widened their lead in the eighth. After Arnold Leon struck out the side in order in the seventh, he walked the leadoff man in the eighth and two batters later, gave up an RBI double to Corey Dickerson, which extended his hitting streak to 14 games. Two batters later, Tanos came to the plate and brought Dickerson home with his second double of the night, giving the Nuts a 4-0 cushion.

Leon would go 1.2 innings and allow two runs on two hits while striking out four.

Kurt Yacko started the ninth for the Nuts and set the side down in order, including a strikeout of Michael Gilmartin to end the ballgame.

Miles Head broke up Bergman's string of 16 in a row retired with a single to right in the seventh, extending his hitting streak to 14 games.

Stockton and Modesto will play the second game of their four-game set on Friday night at John Thurman Field. T.J. Walz (1-0, 2.19 ERA) will head to the bump for the Ports, opposed by Nuts right-hander Juan Gonzalez (0-1, 3.27 ERA). First pitch is set for 7:05 p.m. PDT.

Vollmuth Finding His Form In Burlington

Bill Seals, OaklandClubhouse.com

Apr 19, 2012

BURLINGTON, IA - Many heralded prospects have taken their lumps early on in the Midwest League, and Oakland's third-round selection in last June's draft B.A. Vollmuth is no different.

The former Southern Miss standout makes no bones about his April problems in the Burlington lineup, but says he'll be defined by how he overcomes the adversity.

The talented third baseman has posted just a .208 batting average through his first 53 plate appearances in Low-A ball, but his bat is starting to show signs of life as he has three multi-hit performances in his last seven games.

"I haven't had the best start in the world," said B.A. Vollmuth. "I think [last Thursday] was the first time I had a hit in six games. It is making different adjustments with the pitching, umpiring, atmosphere and temperature.

"We've had a couple games where it's been in the 30s and 40s and windy. It's a little different to hit in that temperature than we're used to. We came from 80 degrees in Arizona to here where it's 40 and windy."

Just how difficult can it be to get into an early-season rhythm? Just as Vollmuth was starting to find himself, Monday's game in Appleton, Wisconsin, was snowed out.

Once Vollmuth gets comfortable in his new surroundings, the A's organization expects him to perform up to his potential and challenge for a potential High-A Stockton promotion by year's end.

After signing shortly before the deadline last August, Vollmuth earned a brief four-game cameo at Vermont in the New York-

Penn League, and he went 7-for-14 with five extra-base hits and six RBIs.

"I took my time, found some pitches I liked and was able to barrel them up," he said.

"It was the first time I got to play with a team since college. I actually had fans cheering us on and the day-to-day routine and grind – I got to see what that's about. I'm glad I got to experience it. We won the last four and went to the playoffs, so I got some taste of that."

Vollmuth kept up the production in minor-league spring training and earned the praise of A's farm director Keith Lieppman, who said he had as good a preseason as any player.

"Spring is kind of just the time to get you right," Vollmuth said.

"I was locked in for spring training, everything felt good, but I kind of let my routine slack a little bit. It's showing now. I need to get back into that rhythm again. I struggled a little bit here and had to go back to the basics. Now I'm starting to put some things together and feel good at the plate."

A slight tweak in his mechanics has Vollmuth poised to become an even better hitter for Burlington.

"I had a big leg kick last year and completely took it out of my game," he said.

"I focused on laying in soft and my rhythm and timing. I was ready to go for spring. But then I got away from my routine, stopped doing that, and then everything kind of came back. Now I know I've got to stick with it and focus on my routine."

A two-time Conference USA first-team all-conference performer at Southern Miss, Vollmuth signed with the A's after sliding down the board to the 105th overall pick. He came to the organization after a standout career for the Golden Eagles. Vollmuth hit 32 homers and posted an OPS higher than 1000 in his final two years.

Although he admits the draft process was difficult to watch unfold, Vollmuth was happy to finally sign with Oakland and get his pro career underway.

"My family had a lot more fun than I did, because it's kind of nerve-wracking and aggravating sitting there seeing name after name go wondering when I'm going to get picked up," he said.

"I wanted to sign and was ready to forego my last year and become an Athletic. It was more just money talk between my agent and the Athletics. We really didn't talk much. Everybody understood what was going on. We figured we'd go down in August, more towards the deadline and ended up signing late. I got in some games and am happy I signed. It was the right move for me."

In an organization that has shown the desire to move players through the system, Vollmuth likes his chances with the A's.

"I think the Athletics as a whole push people through," he said.

"I'm very fortunate to be in the position I am. It's good that we don't have as many people in certain positions and stuff like that, but if I don't pan out there's always somebody else who will. I just need to focus on myself and what I can control."

And, at least for now, that's becoming the strong presence in the heart of the Burlington batting order.

Bees Blanked in Pitchers' Duel

By Daniel Trivinos / Burlington Bees

BURLINGTON, Iowa - The Bees pitching staff looked great, but the Lansing Lugnuts looked excellent on the mound en route to a 2-0 win over the Bees. Bees' hurler, Raul Alcantara has his best start of the season, but it wasn't quite good enough in a contest that featured 12 top-30 prospects.

The Lugnuts sent two top-prospects to the hill and both looked equally effective. In fact, both pitchers tossed three innings and each gave up one hit while striking out three apiece. Justin Nicolino is the fifth ranked prospect in the Toronto Blue Jays farm system and started the game for the Lugnuts. Aaron Sanchez is the sixth ranked prospect in the Jays organization and earned the win.

The Bees countered with right-hander Raul Alcantara (0-2) who had his best outing of the season. Alcantara is also considered a top-30 prospect and looked like one on Thursday night. He faced trouble in the first inning when he allowed the first two runners to reach. But the 19-year-old regained his focus and ended the inning without yielding a run.

Alcantara didn't look quite as sharp to start the top of the third inning. Markus Brisker led off the inning with a walk then stole a base and advanced to third on a throwing error by the catcher, Nick Rickles. With one out, Alcantara gave up an RBI triple to Kenny Wilson, and served up an RBI single to Carlos Perez. With a man at first and already down 2-0, Alcantara induced a double play to end the inning. He went on to pitch a season-high six innings and only allowed two runs on seven hits. For the first time this season, Alcantara mixed his hard fastball and off-speed pitches effectively.

Drew Tyson and Chaz Mye looked perfect out of the pen and some nice defensive plays by the Bees helped keep them in the game.

But the Bees' bats looked dead at the plate. The offense struck out ten times and only produced two hits. Even worse, the Bees only managed three base runners over the course of nine innings. But the Lugnuts pitching staff boasts a team ERA of 1.73, so the struggles at the plate were expected.