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Dodgers' Josh Lindblom follows 'obsession of serving' to L.A.'s Skid Row, food and faith in hand

By Tim Brown

LOS ANGELES – On the corner of 6th and Crocker in downtown Los Angeles, in a neighborhood the politicians call Central City East but the residents know as Skid Row, the backs of our throats were coated in disinfectant vapors. These came from the tanker trucks inching along the curb, and the hoses waved by men in hazmat suits whose task it was to wash away the needles, condoms, human waste and whatever else had fallen into the gutter over so many cold, desperate nights.

The denizens of those gutters stood nearby. They seemed unmoved by the city's effort to power-spray and freshen their stained and weary corner. They held sacks and backpacks and watched the plodding truck, its guardians and rubbery tentacles. They leaned against shopping carts whose contents – blankets, recyclable bottles and clothes, but hardly any food – were piled to overhead. The odor and taste of the decontaminant, and whatever it was that was building in the backs of throats, they couldn't bother with that.

Dodgers reliever Josh Lindblom speaks with Charles, a St. Louis native living temporarily in a nearby shelter. ...By last count, more than 4,000 people lived on Skid Row's streets, hidden in its alleys, leaning against its tired buildings, in a 4-by-10 foot block plot. On a morning in mid-June, maybe a couple dozen were on the corner of 6th and Crocker, watching the truck and waiting on the vans that would roll down from a hilltop in nearby Echo Park, bringing hot food, fresh fruit and water.

This is the contradiction that is Skid Row. The streets were clean. The people wore last week's stench, last week's hunger.

It doesn't end there, either. In fact, if one were to gather all the inconsistencies of Skid Row and pile them in the gutter, the city would need a lot more trucks.

Josh Lindblom hoisted two boxes of oranges from a white van that had seen some hard miles. "Dream Center" was written across its side. After lugging a few more boxes through the poor and homeless gathered expectantly near two folding tables, Josh said to me, "You want to take a walk?"

Josh, 25, was there as a volunteer. So was his wife, Aurielle. Raised in West Lafayette, Ind., having met in high school, they'd moved to Pasadena, Calif., just a few months earlier, when Josh landed a job in the Los Angeles Dodgers' bullpen. He is 6-foot-4, 240 pounds, throws a 94-mph fastball, hadn't shaved that morning, and wore a T-shirt that hyped the L.A. Kings' Stanley Cup championship. He has a luggish quality about him, friendly unless provoked. Aurielle is small and blonde with sparkling blue eyes and perfectly red toenails.

Josh headed up East 6th Street. I followed. The smell made me long for the bleach cloud billowing behind us. "It's not God who has failed us, it's us who have failed all these people," Josh said. "They're just family members who've fallen on hard times."

He stopped in front of a middle-aged woman who appeared to have spent a sleepless night where she stood. Her expression demanded, "What?"

"Hi, I'm Josh," he said. "What's your name?"

She stared.

"If you're hungry, we're serving hot breakfast down on the corner there," he said, pointing toward what was turning into a crowd.

She stared.

"OK, well, there's eggs and fruit and water and stuff," he said. "God bless."

We continued up the block. A man smiled, offered his name and hand, and thanked Josh for the news.

"The first time we came down here," Josh said, "I was pretty scared."

He'd lost track of Aurielle for a while that first morning, and a couple men had told him to get lost, and another had wanted money or otherwise requested he take that sorry-ass hi-I'm-Josh-act and get out of his damn face.

"One guy, he was in a wheelchair," Josh said. "He said he couldn't go for food because he'd lose his spot on the sidewalk. When I asked if I could pray for him, he said, 'Pray for my next breath. Pray that I see another sunrise.' Man, everybody has a story."

As we turned right on South San Pedro Street, the middle-aged woman who hadn't spoken watched us go, peeked again over her shoulder, and shuffled toward a warm breakfast.

Ahead, a young man held open a briefcase at about chest-high. Three other men looked over the contents. They haggled over the prices, came to an agreement, and made the exchange. The three men walked away with one lighter, one pipe and three hits of crack cocaine.

On South San Pedro, a black-and-white police car passed at barely more than an idle.

The Dream Center is a massive complex on a hill a few minutes from Dodger Stadium and a little farther from downtown. Once a hospital, the structure, its grounds, the people and the guiding principles tend to a list of formidable ailments: drugs, gangs, orphans, homeless, trafficked women, shattered families and lost souls.

They pass in groups, moving from breakfast to chores, from school to church service, from what they were to what they hope they can be. At the very least, to what others hope they can be.

Volunteers from the Dream Center offered free breakfast at 6th and Crocker in L.A. (Y! Sports) Among them was Patrick, a light-skinned African-American with eyes the color of cobalt. Growing up, he said, he'd been shunned by whites for the color of his skin and distrusted by blacks for the color of his eyes. Left alone, he turned to drugs and violence, did time and lost a family that included four daughters. Here, he said, he'd found acceptance from those seeking a similar path. He'd found his peace in the Dream Center's nurturing and rigid program. For Father's Day, he would have 15 visitors, including his daughters, he said, "The lights of my life."

"I was a hard man," he said. "Now I'm clean. I'm happy. I didn't know I could be. I cry all the time now."

Founded 19 years ago by Tommy Barnett and his son, Matthew, the Dream Center – at its heart a Christian mission – rose from Matthew's idea to take in one homeless man in the spare room of his apartment. Today, 650 people live in a sprawling complex. By the end of the year, when renovations to the main building are complete, there will be room for 350 more.

Standing on the roof during the afternoon, Pastor Matthew could look through the haze to see downtown to his right and the light stanchions of Dodger Stadium to his left. Far below, a line of men, women, boys and girls soldiered through their day. Those that make it, they rehabilitate here for a year, sometimes longer. Many return as volunteers, staff members, even pastors.

"It's been finding a need and filling it," Pastor Matthew said. "Healing it. The need has kind of dictated the call." Josh Lindblom had listened to Pastor Matthew on his car radio. He'd never heard of the Dream Center, never heard of Matthew Barnett, never heard of any of this.

"But he was screaming at me," Josh said.

When he got home, he researched the man and his mission, and discovered both were mere blocks from Dodger Stadium. He told Aurielle. Then they showed up and asked what they could do. Josh makes frequent trips to Skid Row. Aurielle helps with the families on-site, or travels into the community to provide bedding, food and services. Down on 6th and Crocker, while Josh walked the neighborhood, Aurielle served scrambled eggs to hundreds.

"He's living out his dream," Aurielle said, nodding to Josh, meaning the baseball. "We thought we should use it for good. You know, you can only live for yourself for so long.

"It's making him – both of us – realize there's so much more to life than his baseball career. I can just tell, even if he doesn't do as well as he'd like, he knows it's OK, that it's just a game."

Lindblom has a 2.12 ERA in 31 games out of the bullpen in 2012. (US Presswire) Together they recently held the official launch of the Josh Lindblom Foundation, which already had done charitable work in West Lafayette. The night before, they'd hosted 500 people from Dream Center at Dodger Stadium for a game in which Josh pitched a scoreless inning.

So, as Josh walked the grounds at Dream Center, he'd hear it from the residents.

"Good game, Josh!"

"Nice one-two-three inning, Josh!"

"They shoulda kept you in, man! That was a W!"

Josh would wave and laugh. "Thanks," he'd say. "You have a good time? How you doing?"

They'd smile at the Dodger among them and tell him they were good, you know, hangin' in there. That life was good. Later, a hundred or more of the residents would sing Happy Birthday to Josh, who'd hold up his hand in thanks.

"I would call it an obsession of serving," Pastor Matthew said of Josh and Aurielle. "This is a journey here. When people come along on the journey, it's a spark. Josh is like a hero here. I've never quite seen anybody who's come into our world like him."

Michael, a powerfully built man who was coming up on a year at Dream Center, stopped and gave Josh a rough hug. He'd been dropped here in handcuffs going on a year ago, he said, "Right over there." Dragged in against the will of his anger and the crack cocaine, Michael said he was about to re-up for another year, that one day they'd have to drag him out.

"My thinking has changed," he said. "My heart's changed. It's integrity. That's a powerful word to use here, what you do when nobody's looking. It's true humility, bro."

Beside him, Josh smiled. Michael smiled back.

"We learn that love really exists," he said. "Most of us come from places that don't know love."

I asked him if he felt forgotten here, in this place up on a hill, where from any window he could see the rest of the world going on.

"I don't feel forgotten at all," he said. "I feel like my mother can sleep at night knowing where I'm at. That love that you have here? It's like an oasis."

Someday, Michael said, he'd leave Dream Center. Try life again, outside the oasis.

"I'm not saying I'm ready yet," he said. "But I'm on the right path."

We met Charles in front of a Laundromat on South San Pedro. He was 24, from St. Louis, and had driven with his uncle to Los Angeles. Now his uncle was gone and so was his money. He had a bed down the block at the Union Rescue Mission for a few more nights, but didn't know after that.

"Out here is not where it's at," Charles said. "Everybody's on drugs and I ain't into drugs."

He said it had been a few days anyway.

Besides, he said, he couldn't just go back to St. Louis, not like this. He carried his important belongings in a backpack, hunching his shoulders against its weight. His eyes were half-closed, his clothes beginning to show the wear of the streets.

"I wanna show my mom I can do it on my own," he said. "She doesn't have to keep picking me up."
Dream Center residents sang happy birthday for Lindblom. (Y! Sports) Josh put a hand on Charles' shoulder.
"Ever heard of the Dream Center?" Josh asked.

On the way back to 6th and Crocker, we'd become three. We navigated the clusters of men and women who had nowhere to be, other than here, which was pretty close to nowhere.

"Hi, I'm Josh," Josh would say, and Charles and I would walk ahead. Charles had played basketball and football in high school, and was pulling for the Miami Heat.

"For LeBron," he said. "He deserves it."

We returned to the corner towing a few more appetites. A man stood in line strumming a guitar. Trey Hillman, the Dodgers' bench coach, leaned over the man's shoulder and bobbed his head. Another sat on the curb with his breakfast, his legs stretched out before him. He had no shoes. His socks were torn. His feet were purple and swollen. A Dream Center volunteer named Joe asked the man for his shoe size. Joe nodded, untied his sneakers and handed them to the man.

"The coolest thing for me is it's all unconditional," Hillman said. "Love people for what they are and not what you think they should be. They want to feel like somebody cares."

The people on the corner, they wouldn't know Josh Lindblom from the guy behind the liquor store counter. He's some white dude in a Kings T-shirt, pleasant enough, probably not a cop, certainly not from around here, and says "God bless" a lot, so just part of the daily contradiction here.

In that way, he's like the seemingly destitute old man who walked up to measure the commotion, turned down a banana because he hates potassium, then announced what a wonderful day it was.

"Wanna know why?" he asked.

His hand disappeared into his coat pocket and came out with a fistful of hundred-dollar bills.

"Yes," he said, "a wonderful day."

Aurielle laughed.

"You probably should put that away," she said.

A mural adorned a wall near the Dream Center breakfast. (Y! Sports)The world spins different on the corner. Faith exists where it probably shouldn't, except maybe that's all that grows there. Or all that's healthy. The food trucks from up the hill come three times a day to feed dozens, maybe hundreds, of the thousands. And Josh comes with them when he can, choosing to believe that every handshake, every orange, every prayer is a start to something better. He can't help them all. He'll start with one, maybe see where that takes him. See, it's not just them that he's healing.

"We wanted to make a change in people's lives," he said. "What they don't know is the change they're making in my heart. There's nowhere else I'd rather be."

ESPN.COM

Tommy Milone of A's stifles Dodgers with first career complete game

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- The way Tommy Milone was dealing in the late innings, there was little doubt he would get a chance to finish what he started.

Milone pitched a three-hitter for his first career complete game, Yoenis Cespedes had two hits and an RBI in his return to the Oakland lineup and the Athletics beat the Los Angeles Dodgers 4-1 on Wednesday night for their seventh win in eight games.

"It felt like I was the closer," Milone said. "It's such a good feeling. Hopefully you make good pitches throughout the game. Luckily I did and I was able to be out there in the ninth."

Cespedes scored Oakland's first run after a double and added an RBI single in the fifth to back another strong start at home by Milone (7-5) as the A's took their second straight from the first-place Dodgers.

Milone walked one, struck out two and retired 22 of the final 24 hitters he faced, with Jerry Hairston Jr. hitting an infield single in the seventh and Dee Gordon reaching on an error by second baseman Jemile Weeks in the eighth. Milone threw 112 pitches in Oakland's first complete game of the season.

He snapped a four-start winless streak and improved to 5-1 at the Coliseum with a major league-leading 0.99 ERA at home.

"It's definitely a lot easier to pitch here just because you can leave a ball over the plate and they hit a good fly ball like they did at times tonight and there's a bunch of room so our guys can track it down," Milone said.

Nathan Eovaldi (0-3) was once again a tough-luck loser for the Dodgers as he failed to get support from his hitters and also made a defensive blunder that keyed a two-run fifth inning for the A's.

After Eric Sogard singled and Coco Crisp walked, Weeks laid down a sacrifice bunt attempt that Eovaldi fielded. He looked at third before throwing to first with that slight hesitation, allowing Weeks to beat out the play for a hit that left Los Angeles manager Don Mattingly shaking his head in disgust in the dugout.

Josh Reddick, mired in an 0-for-19 slump, followed by hitting into a double play that scored Sogard and gave Oakland a 2-1 lead. Cespedes hit an RBI single to make it 3-1.

"We need to take the out there," Mattingly said. "That's one that he knows he's got to barehand it. With that guy running he checks third and then it's too late. As soon as he checks third we're like, 'Oh God.' That was one. We gave them an extra base there and they end up with two runs in that inning."

Cespedes returned to the lineup after getting just one at-bat since June 7 because of a strained left hamstring. He had no problems adjusting to a new role as designated hitter, hitting the ball hard all four times, including a fly out to the wall in the eighth inning.

"Every at-bat was good," manager Bob Melvin said. "One thing you worry about is pitch selection and whether or not he's prepared for the breaking ball after the layoff. Boy he was on it. It was pretty impressive to see." Eovaldi allowed three runs and seven hits in six innings. The Dodgers are winless in his five starts even though he has a 2.35 ERA and hasn't allowed more than three runs in any game.

The Dodgers have been held to one run and five hits in losing the first two games of this series.

"It's baseball, man, you can't hit all the time," Hairston said. "It's one of those things where we had a really good stretch. It's obviously a combination of really good pitching and it's just the game, that's how it goes sometimes."

Brandon Moss added his seventh homer for Oakland in the eighth to make it 4-1.

Both teams scored their first run on doubles that hit off the glove of an opposing outfielder. Reddick nearly made a diving catch in right field to rob Juan Uribe in the second inning but the ball popped out of his glove as he hit the ground and Juan Rivera scored on the RBI double.

Dodgers center fielder Tony Gwynn Jr. was unable to make a running catch in left-center in the fourth against Seth Smith with the ball hitting off his outstretched glove to allow Cespedes to score the tying run.

Baseball's best playoff performances

Staff

They've been playing the World Series since 1903, when the Boston Pilgrims beat the Pittsburgh Pirates five games to three in a best-of-nine format. Which makes last year's playoffs the ... what? 109th postseason in Major League Baseball history?

That's a lot of history, whether our math is right or wrong. That's a lot of spectacular single-game individual performances from which to assemble a list of the top 25 best ever.

Still, that was our charge; so assemble, we did. We put together a panel of our baseball experts to peruse baseball's annals and call out the players who produced the very best single games when those single games counted the most. We went back back back back back to those thrilling days of yesteryear, yesterdecade ... OK, yestercentury for some of our choices. For others, we just had to look eighth months or so into the past -- a measure of just how splendid last year's MLB playoffs were. But man, it was hard.

What did we find? Read on. But here's a hint or two: In general, our experts seemed to gravitate to outstanding pitching performances more often than they did to exceptional days or nights at the plate by hitters (though the bats are well-represented). Look closely enough and you'll find a couple of defensive specialists on the list, too. And our panel didn't limit itself to World Series games. The list includes a healthy dose of league championship series and division-round spectacles, too.

How'd we do? Let us know. Help us mend the error of our ways.

Here we go, starting at No. 25 and working up (down?) to No. 1 ...

7. Sandy Koufax, Dodgers: 1965 World Series, Game 7

IP	H	R	ER	BB	K
9.0	3	0	0	3	10

Result: Dodgers 2, Twins 0

Series: Los Angeles Dodgers win in 7

He was pitching on just two days' rest, but then, so was his counterpart on the Twins, Jim Kaat. He'd already lost a game in this World Series, but then, so had Kaat, who matched up with him in Game 2 (a 5-1 Minnesota victory) and Game 5 (a 7-0 Dodgers win). But Koufax had one disadvantage in Game 7 that Kaat didn't have to work through: arthritis. In other games through his too-short (12 years) career, Koufax might have been more dominant, more effective, than he was in this one – including a then-record 15-strikeout dazzler in Game 1 of the 1963 World Series against the Yankees. But this performance stands out as perhaps his most glorious moment, as he battled through the sore arm and the fatigue to keep the Twins scoreless in a complete-game, 10-strikeout, 2-0 shutout. He still had the remarkable fastball at the end, striking out Earl Battey and Bob Allison to end the game.

DODGERS.COM

Eovaldi stumbles, offense struggles vs. A's

By Ken Gurnick

OAKLAND -- The Dodgers on Wednesday night did what they've been doing best lately, wasting another Nathan Eovaldi quality start in a 4-1 Interleague loss to the Oakland A's.

In five starts this year, Eovaldi is winless with a total of three runs of support while he's in the game. "We're testing him," manager Don Mattingly said.

Of course, the current Dodgers offense is testing the entire rotation, not just Eovaldi. With Matt Kemp and Mark Ellis out, Andre Ethier, A.J. Ellis and Jerry Hairston slumping, and no bat for opponents to fear, the Dodgers have been held to fewer than three runs in 12 of their past 25 games.

"We're without that one guy in the lineup they're completely terrified of," catcher A.J. Ellis said when asked if opponents approach the Dodgers differently without Kemp. "Andre is still an All-Star kind of player, but without his buddy, we're missing the two-headed monster that's tough to get through."

Los Angeles scored one run on five hits in 18 innings against Oakland, a combined two-hitter Tuesday night followed by rookie Tommy Milone's first complete game Wednesday night, a three-hitter. National League Cy Young Award winner Clayton Kershaw is tasked with avoiding a series sweep in Thursday's finale.

Mattingly shied from the Kemp factor and explained away the recent run reduction to opponents and their big ballparks.

"They know the ball is not going anywhere and we're not going to hit a lot of balls in the seats," he said. "They know exactly how to play here. They attacked us.

"I think this is a time to not panic, that's what we can do. We're going through a stretch where we're having trouble scratching for runs. Places like this, Seattle, it's hard for us to score a lot of runs. Their pitchers attacked us. Their pitch counts were down, that means they're throwing strikes."

Even though they no longer have the best record in baseball, the Dodgers own a 4 1/2-game lead atop the NL West. Eovaldi made it through six innings on 100 pitches, charged with three runs. He's 0-3 subbing for Ted Lilly in the rotation, despite a 2.35 ERA. The Dodgers are 0-5 in his starts.

"I know they'll score runs for me," said Eovaldi, dismissing any negative Karma.

Nonetheless, the only one he got in the second inning was tainted. With two outs and Juan Rivera on second base, Juan Uribe hit a soft fly ball off Milone to shallow right field. Outfielder Josh Reddick got to the ball in time to make a reaching catch, but he followed through by tumbling over and the ball flew out of his glove as Rivera scored. It was ruled a double.

"Early on in the game, I felt like they were hitting some balls pretty hard up in the air, which is good here at the Coliseum, because it's such a big park," said Milone. "Guys in the outfield were tracking them all down."

Eovaldi got away with leadoff four-pitch walks in the first and second innings, but the A's tied the game in the fourth with doubles on back-to-back pitches. Yoenis Cespedes (who had two hits and two hard-hit outs) led off with a double into the left-field corner and scored when Seth Smith followed with a double to left-center field off the glove of center fielder Tony Gwynn.

Eovaldi lapsed himself into a big mess in the fifth after a leadoff single by No. 9 hitter Eric Sogard (.145 average) and a walk to Coco Crisp (.205). Jemile Weeks dropped a perfect sacrifice bunt that was fielded by Eovaldi. Catcher A.J. Ellis urged a throw to first, but Eovaldi initially looked at third base and then rushed a throw to first that Weeks beat to load the bases.

"I just looked at third. I don't know why," said Eovaldi. "It was a perfect bunt. I should have gone to first." Reddick bounced into a double play as Sogard scored the tie-breaking run with Crisp taking third, and Crisp scored on Cespedes' bloop single to left for a 3-1 lead. Oakland's final run came on an eighth-inning homer by Brandon Moss off Scott Elbert.

Meanwhile, Milone retired 14 consecutive batters between a second-inning walk to Gwynn and a seventh-inning infield single by Hairston that snapped an 0-for-19 drought.

Gordon gets some tutelage from Henderson

By Ken Gurnick

OAKLAND -- If Dee Gordon does not evolve into an elite Major League basestealer, it won't be for lack of mentors. He's already been tutored by the likes of basestealing legends Maury Wills and Davey Lopes. This week Gordon met the self-proclaimed greatest of all time, Rickey Henderson, who has no official role with the A's but suits up and hangs out as he chooses.

"We had a nice conversation," said Gordon. "Oh my God, the man knows stealing. A lot of it is what I've heard from Maury and Davey. These are guys that are the best at what they do and each one does it a little bit different. Not really a different meaning, but a different voice and a different view."

Gordon said as soon as he saw Henderson on the field Tuesday he went up to him, unescorted, and introduced himself. Gordon said he never mentioned his famous father, former pitcher Tom Gordon, nor did Henderson. Did Gordon see Henderson, who is 53, play?

"I had gone to see my uncle, Clyde [Pork Chop] Pough, play in independent league for Nashua [in 2003], and Rickey was playing against him for Newark," Gordon said. "That's crazy, huh?"

Henderson finished his Hall of Fame career playing briefly for the Dodgers in 2003.

Kershaw looks to bounce back against A's

By Ken Gurnick

OAKLAND -- Clayton Kershaw gets a shot at a bounce-back start Thursday when the Dodgers conclude their series with the A's.

Kershaw allowed five runs (four earned) on a season-high-tying eight hits in a six-inning no-decision against the White Sox on Friday.

Kershaw has been battling plantar fasciitis in his left foot, although he's insisted the painful condition doesn't bother him pitching. Two weeks ago, the southpaw briefly eliminated between-starts running for conditioning, but he has since resumed the activity.

"He has to keep dealing with it," said manager Don Mattingly. "He's had to modify his workout so it doesn't get worse. He said he doesn't feel it pitching or pushing off [the rubber], but he's changed his routine a little and that sometimes can affect you. It sounds like it's no better, no worse. It's not like it's going away."

The defending National League Cy Young Award winner is 5-3 with a 2.86 ERA. After winning the pitching Triple Crown (wins, ERA and strikeouts) last year, the only category in which he ranks in the top 10 is strikeouts (88 for eighth). The number that really stands out is 10 homers allowed in 94 1/3 innings, including two to Adam Dunn and Carlos Rios on Friday night. In 233 1/3 frames last year, Kershaw allowed only 15 homers. Left-handed hitters have four homers this year compared to three all last year.

Since pitching a May 19 shutout against the Cardinals, Kershaw has allowed 17 runs in 32 2/3 innings (4.68 ERA).

Belisario a key cog to Dodgers' bullpen

By Ken Gurnick

OAKLAND -- The Dodgers' bullpen depth, undercut in 2010 and '11 by the unreliability of troubled reliever Ronald Belisario, has been bailed out this year by ... Belisario?

"It has been a pleasant surprise," manager Don Mattingly said of the right-hander, who is 3-0 with a 1.25 ERA in 21 games.

"He's been really good and been a good citizen, no issues of any kind," said Mattingly. "He's been great. We've had injuries to Javy Guerra and Matt Guerrier for extended times, and Belly has given us a late-inning guy. He came in early in the year and we figured to use him in the sixth and seventh, but he's worked his way toward the end of the game. He's been solid. A nice surprise."

Belisario, who started his season late after he served a 25-game suspension for a positive cocaine test in 2010, has evolved into sharing setup duties with Josh Lindblom. Belisario has held opposing hitters to a .129 average, hasn't allowed any of the four inherited runners to score and has retired 17 of 21 first batters faced.

Belisario said he's even more focused on throwing strikes over the last two weeks as he's begun wearing prescription glasses while he pitches.

Mattingly weighs in on par tar, cheating

OAKLAND -- Manager Don Mattingly started squirming when asked to weigh in on the spat between Rays manager Joe Maddon and Nationals skipper Davey Johnson in the wake of Tuesday night's pine tar ejection. Mattingly did, however, weigh in on the issue of pine tar and cheating.

"Personally, the way I look at pine tar, a lot of guys use some form to get a better grip," said Mattingly. "There's a difference in that and doctoring a ball or scraping it or using sandpaper."

Mattingly played a supporting role in the all-time pine tar controversy, George Brett's pine tar home run in 1983 against Mattingly's Yankees. When that protested game was resumed, Mattingly played second base, only the second left-hander to play a middle infield position since 1970.

LA TIMES

Dodgers get no lift against Oakland Athletics lefty

By Jim Peltz

OAKLAND — Before Nathan Eovaldi took the mound Wednesday, Manager Don Mattingly praised the 22-year-old pitcher for being "unflappable" in the face of meager run support this year.

"He hasn't complained, you don't see him getting down," Mattingly said.

Good thing, because the Dodgers again left Eovaldi with almost no cushion for error, scoring only one run against the Oakland Athletics in the right-hander's six innings of work.

That wasn't nearly good enough, as Oakland left-hander Tommy Milone tossed a three-hitter — his first career complete game — in the Athletics' 4-1 win at Oakland Coliseum, their second victory in the teams' three-game interleague series.

Indeed, the Dodgers' bats have suddenly gone cold. The Dodgers have scored only three runs in their last three games, and in the two games with Oakland the Dodgers have a total of five hits.

Andre Ethier went hitless in four at-bats as the designated hitter Wednesday and is hitting .179 so far in June. Catcher A.J. Ellis is batting .214 in June after hitting .333 in May.

"For the last few days we've kind of scuffled at the plate," Ellis said. "But it's not for a lack of effort."

As a result, Eovaldi (0-3) still is looking for his first victory since the Texan was called up May 29 to replace Ted Lilly in the rotation.

"We're testing him," Mattingly said, referring to the poor run support.

In addition to the three runs, Eovaldi gave up seven hits, walked three and too often had trouble putting the ball where he wanted. He needed 100 pitches to get through his six innings.

"I felt good out there, I just kind of struggled with my fastball command," Eovaldi said. "I was behind on almost every count, I felt, so it's hard to work that way."

The Dodgers scored their run in the second inning when Juan Rivera singled, moved to second base on Bobby Abreu's groundout and scored when Juan Uribe hit a fly ball that Oakland right fielder Josh Reddick couldn't hold as he somersaulted on the grass.

Oakland tied the game in the fourth inning when designated hitter Yoenis Cespedes doubled off the left-field wall and

Seth Smith followed with a double to the left-center field gap that deflected off Tony Gwynn Jr.'s glove, scoring Cespedes.

Eric Sogard singled to open the fifth inning and Coco Crisp walked. Jemile Weeks then bunted to Eovaldi, who took a split second to look at third base for a possible forceout, then threw too late to first base to get Weeks.

"We need to take that out there," Mattingly said. "We gave them an extra base right there."

With the bases now loaded, Sogard scored when Reddick grounded into a double play, and Cespedes' single drove in Crisp for a 3-1 lead.

Brandon Moss added a solo home run against Dodgers reliever Scott Elbert in the eighth inning for Oakland's fourth run.

Dodgers reliever Ronald Belisario 'a nice surprise,' manager says

By Jim Peltz

OAKLAND — When relief pitcher Ronald Belisario returned to the Dodgers on May 4, the team did not know what to expect.

After all, the hard-throwing Venezuelan had not pitched for the Dodgers since Oct. 1, 2010, because of various personal problems, including a 25-game suspension at the start of this season.

But since Belisario rejoined the club, "It's been a nice surprise," Manager Don Mattingly said.

Entering Wednesday's play, Belisario was 3-0 with a 1.25 earned-run average. He had given up three runs in 21 appearances covering 21²/₃ innings while holding batters to a .129 average and striking out 15.

The 29-year-old Belisario also had retired 17 of the 21 first batters he had faced.

"It feels good that I came back here and do a good job," Belisario said.

He acknowledged that, given his past, the Dodgers could have had doubts about how effective he would be again, but that "I'm working hard to try to help the team."

Belisario missed last season because he was denied entry into the United States after testing positive for cocaine, and he had to serve the suspension at the start of this season in accordance with baseball's drug policy.

"He's been really good and he's been a good citizen," Mattingly said. "He's been here on time, we haven't had any issues with anything with Beli."

Mattingly said Belisario's pitching has been especially important in light of injuries to relievers Javy Guerra, Matt Guerrier and Blake Hawksworth.

When Belisario returned in May, "We looked at him as maybe [being useful] in the sixth [inning] or early" in a game, but "he's worked his way to the end of the game" in the seventh and eighth innings "and he's been solid," Mattingly said.

Belisario kept pitching in Venezuela during his absence from the big leagues and said "it didn't hurt me" to be away from the spotlight, Belisario said. His performance so far this year is reminiscent of his standout 2009 season, when he had a 2.04 ERA in 69 games.

"I was pitching when I was back home and I figured I didn't lose anything," he said. "I feel like I got better, more

consistent."

Ethier day and night

Andre Ethier has been slumping at the plate lately, and that's especially true before nightfall.

Though Ethier was batting .339 in night games entering Wednesday's play, he was batting .169 in day games.

"Luckily we don't play that many day games," Ethier quipped.

Did the Phoenix native have any idea why he has struggled when the sun is shining?

"No, not at all," he said.

Dodgers' offense missing in action in 4-1 loss to Athletics

By Steve Dilbeck

Some day Nathan Eovaldi will win a game again. Of course, some day just for a change of pace, the Dodgers might actually provide him some offensive support.

As it is, the 22-year-old continues to pitch well, just not well enough to actually walk off as a winner. His latest dash with frustration came Wednesday in Oakland, where the suddenly anemic offense of the Dodgers failed to do much with left-hander Tommy Milone as the A's downed the Dodgers, 4-1.

Making his fifth start in place of sore-shouldered Ted Lilly, Eovaldi went six innings, allowing three runs, seven hits and three walks.

He left with a 2.35 earned-run average and an 0-3 record.

The Dodgers' offense has come to a grinding stop. They had three hits Wednesday, after managing just two hits Tuesday. In their last three games, they have scored one, zero and two runs.

And they had some defensive assistance to even score those.

Wednesday night, they actually scored first before Milone settled down, putting a run across in the second after Juan Rivera singled. Juan Uribe then hit a soft drive to right that Josh Reddick briefly made a nice diving stab of. Briefly, because as he fell, he actually whipped the ball out of his glove.

Unable to hold onto the ball, Uribe was credited with an RBI double. The Dodgers managed just one more hit the rest of the night.

Milone (7-5, and 5-1 at home) was in control the rest of the way. He made it look easy too, continually keeping the Dodgers off balanced.

Milone walked one and struck out two in throwing his three-hitter. It was the first complete game of his career. Eovaldi made his 1-0 lead hold up until surrendering one run in the fourth after Yoenis Cespedes doubled off the glove of Tony Gwynn Jr., who appeared distracted as Bobby Abreu also chased the ball into the left-center gap. Seth Smith doubled to score Cespedes with the tying run.

The A's took the lead with a pair of runs in the fifth after Eric Sogard singled and Coco Crisp walked. Eovaldi then fielded Jemile Weeks' sacrifice bunt and mistakenly looked to throw to second. By the time he fired to first, Weeks was safe to load the bases.

Reddick bounced into a double play to score one and Cespedes singled to score a second.

The A's final run came on a solo homer by Brandon Moss off Scott Elbert.

Dodgers need Andre Ethier to snap out of his offensive funk

By Steve Dilbeck

Half of the Dodgers' two-headed offensive monster remains on the disabled list, and now the other is in a poorly timed slump.

The Dodgers can't do anything about Matt Kemp's sore hamstring but remain patient. They may have no other way to deal with Andre Ethier's slump, either.

Ethier, the team's new \$85-million man, has been struggling at the plate for over two weeks. Even as he continues to lead the National League in RBIs (55), even after getting one of the Dodgers' only two hits Tuesday.

Since June 3, Ethier is batting just .164 (9 for 55, with 16 strikeouts), with one home run and nine RBIs. The home run is the only one he's hit in his last 95 at-bats.

During his 15-game slump, both his on-base percentage (.246) and slugging percentage (.255) have followed his batting average to the lower levels.

The Dodgers' offense is built around Kemp and Ethier, and now they're getting nothing out of one and precious little out of the other.

Over the last 21 games, the Dodgers are 10-11. They've been able to maintain both their 4½-game lead over the Giants and the major's best record, but right now it feels more like they're hanging on.

Ethier's current dry spell can't be assigned to his signing a huge, new contract extension. He was already struggling when he signed.

All players go through slumps during the course of a season, but with Kemp out, Ethier's dry spell is leaving the Dodgers' offense particularly vulnerable.

Either is hardly the only Dodger currently struggling – Jerry Hairston Jr. is 0 for 17, Tony Gwynn Jr. 2 for 20 and Juan Uribe 4 for 21 – but he is the lone truly dangerous bat currently in the lineup. Anyway, he should be.

DAILY NEWS

DODGERS NOTEBOOK: Kershaw will have to pitch through pain

By Gideon Rubin

OAKLAND - The good news about Clayton Kershaw's foot injury is that it doesn't affect his pitching mechanics.

The bad news is the plantar fasciitis he's developed on his left foot likely won't go away anytime soon.

That's according to Dodgers manager Don Mattingly, who said the reigning Cy Young award winner has modified his workouts to avoid exacerbating the injury, but that there's not much else he can do.

"(Plantar fasciitis) doesn't just go away, so it's something that he has to stay on top of, but he's going to keep feeling it," Mattingly said.

It is unclear whether the injury is directly related to drop-off in Kershaw's performance.

Kershaw, who is scheduled to pitch for the Dodgers in today's series finale against the Oakland A's, is 1-1 with a 5.26 ERA over his past four starts, a stretch that has bumped his ERA from 1.97 to 2.86.

"We can talk about it all we want, but it's going to be there a while," Mattingly said.

"As far as we're concerned, it doesn't have anything to do with his actual pitching. He doesn't feel it pitching and he doesn't feel it pushing off. It changes his routine a little bit, and that affects what goes on sometimes, but we'll see."

Citizen Belisario

Reliever Ronald Belisario's return from the baseball wilderness has been a factor in the Dodgers' surprising success.

Belisario, a native Venezuelan who missed all of last season with visa issues and joined the team late after a 25-game suspension for a failed drug test, was 3-0 with a 1.25 ERA in 21 appearances going into Wednesday.

Mattingly said he didn't know what to expect of Belisario when he returned to the team last month, but said he's worked his way into a late-inning role.

Belisario also got high marks for character.

"He's been really good, and he's been a good citizen," Mattingly said. "We haven't had any issues with Beli.

"He's been great."

DODGERS: Eovaldi gets no support again in loss

By Gideon Rubin

OAKLAND - His power arm has impressed scouts for years.

But in the Dodgers clubhouse, Nathan Eovaldi's unflappable demeanor has stood out as much as the high 90s fastball he pumps out effortlessly.

Eovaldi has gotten plenty of chances to showcase his stoicism.

Going into his Wednesday night start against the Oakland A's, Eovaldi was searching for his first win in four starts in which he had a 1.82 ERA.

He's still searching.

Eovaldi (0-3) lurched deeper into tough-luck loser territory with another solid if not outstanding outing on a night when Dodgers hitters, as if on cue, failed to produce on his behalf in a 4-1 loss to the A's in front of 25,383 at O.co Coliseum.

The Dodgers managed just four runs in support of Eovaldi through his first four starts. They've averaged 4.3 runs this season and 4.5 runs when anybody but Eovaldi pitches.

"He hasn't gotten any runs and he's been unflappable through all that," Dodgers manager Don Mattingly said before Wednesday's game. "You don't see him out there getting down. He's just been out there giving us quality outings, keeping us in the games."

Center fielder Tony Gwynn Jr.'s glove helped keep the Dodgers in Wednesday's game on a night when Eovaldi did give up some hard-hit balls. Gwynn made several nice running catches. Gwynn's diving catch on Yoenis Cespedes' line drive in the first saved a run.

Eovaldi allowed three runs on seven hits and three walks in six innings. He struck out two in a 100-pitch outing (his season-high is 103).

The 22-year-old, ranked third among the Dodgers organizational prospects by Baseball America who's just two years removed from Single-A ball, had his fourth quality start in five outings.

"He pitched pretty well for us last year and he's gotten a lot better this year," Mattingly said.

"You really feel like if he makes another jump like this, then you've got something pretty special and you've got a chance to see something special for a long time."

But for a second straight night, the Dodgers offense was nothing special.

A day after being held to two hits in a 3-0 loss, the Dodgers weren't much better.

The Dodgers gave Eovaldi a rare lead in the second when Juan Uribe hit a line drive that popped out of the glove of right fielder Josh Reddick. Uribe's hit went for a double that scored Juan Rivera, who led off the inning with a single and took second on Jerry Hairston Jr.'s grounder.

Rivera is the only leadoff man who's reached two games into the series.

The A's tied the score when Cespedes and Seth Smith hit consecutive doubles leading off the fourth. Cespedes' two-out run-scoring single highlighted a decisive two-run fifth that could have gone much worse from a Dodgers standpoint.

The A's had a bases-loaded, no-outs situation when Eovaldi got Reddick to ground into a run-scoring double play.

Brandon Moss' towering homer to right off reliever Scott Elbert in the eighth made it 4-1.

Saugus resident and former USC standout Tommy Milone (7-5) pitched a three-hitter in which he struck out two and allowed one walk.

OAKLAND 4, DODGERS 1: Eovaldi gets no support again in loss

By Gideon Rubin

OAKLAND — Nathan Eovaldi believes the run support will come eventually.

But the Dodgers' 22-year-old high-ceiling pitching prospect's patience has to be getting stretched thin. Five fine starts into his rookie season, Eovaldi has little to show for it, thanks to an offense that seems to check out whenever he checks in.

He lurched deeper into tough-luck loser territory with another solid if not outstanding outing on a Wednesday night in which Dodgers hitters, as if on cue, failed to produce on his behalf during a 4-1 loss to the Oakland A's in front of 25,383 at O.co Coliseum.

The Dodgers have managed just five runs in support of Eovaldi through his five starts. When anybody but Eovaldi pitches, they've averaged 4.5 runs per game.

Eovaldi (0-3) allowed three runs on seven hits and three walks in six innings. He struck out two in a 100-pitch outing (his season-high is 103).

"I go out there try to give up no runs anyways," he said after another quality start was wasted. on a night when the Dodgers couldn't get much going offensively. "I know they're gonna score runs for me."

Dodgers manager Don Mattingly addressed the lack of run support Eovaldi has experienced before Wednesday's game, when he described him as "unflappable."

"We'll see," Mattingly said when asked how long Eovaldi can go without suffering ill effects from pitching without much of an offense behind him. "We're testing him."

"He's been good. He's been solid in his work and that's what we've asked out of him is to come here, and keep getting better. He continues to do his work and stay on track. Really the only thing that kind of got him out of sorts was 'the bunt.'"

"The bunt" figured prominently when the A's broke a 1-1 deadlock in a decisive two-run fifth.

The A's had runners at first and second with no outs when Eovaldi looked to third after he fielded a perfectly placed Jemile Weeks bunt. That extra split-second was all Weeks needed to beat out the play at first.

The A's broke the tie when Eovaldi got the next batter, Josh Reddick, to ground into a run-scoring double play. Yoenis Cespedes followed with a run-scoring single.

"That's a situation where maybe I was trying to do too much," Eovaldi said. ""I just saw third, I don't know why. Perfect bunt. That play's at first all the way."

Center fielder Tony Gwynn Jr.'s glove helped keep the Dodgers in Wednesday's game on a night when Eovaldi did give up some hard-hit balls. Gwynn made several nice running catches, and his diving catch on a Cespedes line drive in the first saved a run.

But for a second straight night, the Dodgers struggled mightily with their bats. A day after being held to two hits in a 3-0 loss, the Dodgers exploded for three hits.

They gave Eovaldi a rare lead in the second, when Juan Uribe hit a line drive that popped out of the glove of right fielder Josh Reddick. Uribe's hit went for a double that scored Juan Rivera, who led the inning with a single and took second on a Jerry Hairston Jr. grounder.

Former Saugus High and USC standout Tommy Milone (7-5) tossed his first career complete game. He pitched a three-hitter in which he struck out two and allowed one walk.

"It felt like I was the closer," Milone said. "It's such a good feeling. Hopefully you make good pitches throughout the game. Luckily I did and I was able to be out there in the ninth."

He snapped a four-start winless streak and improved to 5-1 at the Coliseum with a major league-leading 0.99 ERA at home.

"It's definitely a lot easier to pitch here just because you can leave a ball over the plate and they hit a good fly ball like they did at times tonight and there's a bunch of room so our guys can track it down," Milone said. Milone threw just 112 pitches.

"(Milone) did a good job of keeping us off-balance," Dodgers infielder Jerry Hairston Jr. said. "It was just one of those things where he was on tonight."

Added Mattingly: "What they really did is attack us (in this series). The pitch count has been down both nights so that means they've been throwing strikes and forced us to swing the bats. They didn't give us any extra chances with walks, so they've attacked us and really kept us down."

The Dodgers have had just one leadoff batter reach base (Rivera in the second) two games into the series. "You can not panic is what you can do," Mattingly said of the Dodgers' offensive woes. "We're going to have stretches now and then like this where we have trouble scratching runs. To be honest with you, in a place like this and in a place like Seattle, it's hard for us to score a lot of runs."

TRUE BLUE LA

Milone Has Dodgers Offense Signaling 'Mayday'

By Eric Stephen

The Dodgers offense continued their June swoon on Wednesday night, scoring just one run in a 4-1 loss to the Oakland Athletics. The Dodgers fell to 2-10 all-time in regular season games at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum. The Dodgers have three runs and 14 hits in their last three games.

Tom Milone has found a home in this ballpark, and limited the Dodgers to one run and three hits in nine innings on Wednesday. That actually caused his home ERA to go up, to 0.99. The only run the Dodgers scored came in the second on a pop fly double by Juan Uribe, a ball Josh Reddick had in his glove before losing it during his dive in right field.

Milone retired 14 in a row until the top of the seventh, when Jerry Hairston Jr. reached on an infield single in the hole at shortstop. That single also snapped an 0-for-19 skid for Hairston.

Nathan Eovaldi pitched reasonably well, allowing three runs in six innings, though he only struck out two and walked three on the night. Tony Gwynn Jr. made eight putouts during Eovaldi's six innings, but might have had nine where he able to catch a double off the bat of Seth Smith in the fourth inning allowed the A's to tie the game at 1-1.

Oakland rallied for two runs in the fifth inning, and Brandon Moss added a solo home run in the eighth inning to help make sure the Dodgers didn't lose another one-run game in an Eovaldi start. The Dodgers have scored a total of three runs with Eovaldi in the game in his five starts this season, all losses.

OC REGISTER

Dodgers announce interesting partnership

By Jeff Miller

Having the best record in baseball isn't enough to fill their stadium, so the Dodgers are teaming up with an unlikely partner in hopes of putting more seats in the seats.

Grammy Award-winning band Linkin Park is the Dodgers' latest gate attraction. The team and band are offering a package that includes a ticket to the Dodgers game June 29 against the New York Mets plus a digital copy of Linkin Park's album "LIVING THINGS," set to come out next week.

The \$23 package features an infield reserve seat. Upon purchase, customers will receive a redemption code for the album. The packages are available at www.dodgers.com/LinkinPark.

One of the songs on "LIVING THINGS" is entitled "Powerless." Here's hoping the Dodgers don't pay tribute to that tune against the Mets.

EXAMINER.COM

Oakland stifles L.A. both Tuesday and Wednesday nights for big wins

By Sam McPherson

Oakland Athletics starting pitchers Brandon McCarthy and Tommy Milone put on quite the display the past two nights at the Oakland Coliseum, as the A's beat the Los Angeles Dodgers two straight -- holding the National League's best team to just one run in 18 innings.

On Tuesday night, McCarthy threw seven shutout innings, giving up only two hits and one walk in the 3-0 Oakland victory.

Tonight, rookie Milone pitched a complete-game, three-hitter as the A's won again, this time by a 4-1 score. Holding the Dodgers to just five hits in two games gave Oakland its third straight series win over an NL West team, after the A's swept the Colorado Rockies on the road last week and followed that up with a series win over the San Diego Padres in Oakland over the weekend.

The A's are on a 7-1 streak right now, and the past two nights have been pitching clinics, of course. And offensively, Oakland did just enough both nights to emerge victorious.

Brandon Moss hit another home run tonight for the A's, while both Cliff Pennington and Yoenis Cespedes each contributed two hits to the cause. The offense went 3-for-8 with runners in scoring position, scoring in the fourth, fifth and eighth innings to secure the win.

Tuesday night, it was three first-inning runs for Oakland that got the game going right from the start: a few hits, aided by a Los Angeles error, and the A's put all the runs needed on the board.

Coco Crisp also stole three bases on Tuesday night as Oakland has increased its AL-leading total to 56 steals now. It might get harder for the A's on Thursday, as they face Clayton Kershaw (5-3, 2.86 ERA) in the midday series finale. Last year's NL Cy Young winner will try to salvage the series for the Dodgers against Oakland's Travis Blackley (1-2, 3.76 ERA).

AM 570 FOX SPORTS LA

Staff

Oakland, CA (Sports Network) - Tommy Milone tossed his first career complete game on Wednesday as the Oakland Athletics downed the Los Angeles Dodgers, 4-1, in the middle installment of a three-game series at the Coliseum.

Milone (7-5) surrendered just one run on three hits and one walk and retired 22 of the final 24 batters he faced to snap a personal four-game winless skid.

Brandon Moss crushed a solo home run and Yoenis Cespedes added an RBI and a run scored for the A's, who have won seven of their last eight games.

Nathan Eovaldi (0-3) remains winless on the year after giving up three runs on seven hits and three walks over six frames to absorb the loss.

Juan Uribe plated the only Dodger run with a double in the second as Los Angeles has managed just five hits over the first two games of this series.

After Juan Rivera singled to start the second, Uribe lofted a ball into shallow right, where Josh Reddick made a diving attempt at the ball, but it popped out of his glove as he hit the ground, allowing Rivera to score to give the visitors a 1-0 lead.

The A's evened the game in the fourth as Cespedes doubled to start the frame and came around to score when Seth Smith clubbed a two-bagger of his own to knot the game at 1-1.

Oakland then loaded the bases in the fifth as Eric Sogard singled, Coco Crisp walked and Jemile Weeks reached first on a perfect bunt single.

Reddick followed with a tailor-made double-play groundout, but it was good enough to plate Sogard from third and provide the A's with a 2-1 edge.

Cespedes then lofted a single into shallow left-center field, scoring Crisp to make it a two-run margin.

Milone shut the Dodgers down after the second, retiring 14 batters in a row before Jerry Hairston singled with one-out in the seventh.

Milone then induced back-to-back groundouts to keep it a two-run game.

Oakland tacked on an insurance run in the eighth when Moss crushed a two-out blast deep into the right-center field seats to extend the lead to 4-1 before Milone fired a perfect ninth to complete the A's first complete game of the season.