

Tribe falls after building four-run lead in Oakland

By Jeff Fletcher / Special to MLB.com | 8/18/2012 2:45 AM ET

OAKLAND -- Shelley Duncan could only shake his head when trying to reconcile this loss.

The Indians' designated hitter had hit the first grand slam of his career, just the second of the season for Cleveland, and it staked his team to a four-run lead in the fourth inning, but somehow he still ended up discussing it hours later in a quiet clubhouse. A losing clubhouse.

"They're all difficult," Duncan said after the Indians wasted the early lead in a 6-4 loss to the A's on Friday night at The Coliseum. "It seems like we've lost so many ways. We've got to try to turn things around. We just couldn't get it done."

The Indians have now lost 16 of their past 20 games, and they have had a lead in eight of those losses. They dropped to a season-worst 11 games under .500.

After the high point of the game, Duncan's grand slam, very little went right for the Indians. Starter Zach McAllister let the A's immediately get back the momentum with three runs in the bottom of the inning, and the A's eventually scored the go-ahead runs in the eighth with the help of a leadoff walk, the type of thing that keeps managers up at night.

"You have to let them hit their way on," manager Manny Acta said. "We haven't done that. We have allowed more runs than anybody and there is a correlation that we have walked more people than anybody. The walks continue to hurt us."

Joe Smith, who had been one of the Indians' best relievers lately, issued the leadoff walk to Chris Carter in the eighth. He then gave up a single to Brandon Moss.

"I got ahead of everybody like I wanted to, I just couldn't put them away," Smith said. "I had both of them 0-2 and they ended up getting on base. In a tie ballgame, that can't happen. You have to find a way to put guys away."

Vinnie Pestano was then summoned to face pinch-hitter Josh Reddick, who had been out of the starting lineup because of a sore tooth. He dumped a bloop single into left, loading the bases.

Josh Donaldson then lined a single, his fourth hit of the night, to drive in the go-ahead run. An out later, Cliff Pennington's sacrifice fly drove in an insurance run.

The Indians went down in the ninth against A's closer Grant Balfour, ending a night that began with such promise.

The Indians jumped to a 4-0 lead on Duncan's grand slam. The stage was set for Duncan by a walk and two singles. He then drilled a 3-2 pitch from Tommy Milone over the left-field wall. Duncan had just three hits in his previous 29 at-bats.

"It was just over the plate," Milone said. "I felt like I got it down enough, but he's a good hitter. He's got a lot of power."

McAllister then took the mound with a comfortable lead, but he couldn't hold it. He gave up three runs in the bottom of the inning and one in the fifth, as the A's tied the game, 4-4.

Acta was critical of a few specific parts of McAllister's game. He threw a changeup to Pennington, the No. 9 hitter, even though he'd just dominated him with a fastball, and Pennington hit it into right for a two-out RBI single. He also failed to keep an eye on Yoenis Cespedes at second base in the fifth inning, allowing him to steal third. Cespedes then scored the tying run on a sacrifice fly.

"I like the way this kid has thrown the ball but I can't expect him to be polished and pitch like a 10-year veteran," Acta said.

McAllister made it through the sixth inning without giving up a run, allowing him to continue his streak. He has not allowed more than four earned runs in any of his 14 starts this season.

Still, he was disappointed with his performance after his team gave him a 4-0 lead.

"Every pitcher wants to put a zero and get the guys back in and get some more runs and keep the momentum," he said. "It's frustrating when you are not able to do that."

Colon takes baton as A's postseason push continues

By Quinn Roberts / MLB.com | 8/18/2012 3:05 AM ET

While it's hard to imagine that many people throughout baseball had predicted the A's would be in playoff contention come mid-August, that's exactly where the team sits, only a half-game back in the American League Wild Card race.

"We're just trying to have fun right now and take it one game at a time," A's shortstop Cliff Pennington said. "The only game that matters is tonight. If we keep playing like that, then at the end of the day we'll be in as good a position as we can be in."

While a young core of players have been the catalyst for the A's resurgence, it'll be veteran Bartolo Colon taking the hill on Saturday against the Indians in Oakland.

The right-hander took a loss in his last outing against the White Sox, allowing six runs -- including five in the sixth -- on nine hits in 5 2/3 innings to snap his three-game winning streak.

"They were making better contact, seeing the ball better," Colon said. "Too many fastballs in that sixth inning. Everyone knows I'm a fastball pitcher. Some were a bit up, and they were looking for it."

Meanwhile, Corey Kluber (0-1, 8.56 ERA) will make his fourth start for the Indians after being called up when Derek Lowe was released on Aug. 2.

Taking his first loss of the season on Sunday against the Red Sox, Kluber was pounded in just 3 1/3 innings, which included a two-run home run from Adrian Gonzalez (first inning) and a two-run double from Carl Crawford (second).

In all, the right-hander allowed six runs on seven hits. He also struck out four in what became a 14-1 rout.

"Kluber just didn't have command of his fastball," manager Manny Acta said. "It was up in the zone. Everything was up. He didn't establish it and he wasn't able to use that swing-and-miss slider that he has. It put us in a bind there."

Indians: Tomlin getting second opinion on elbow

Right-hander Josh Tomlin will travel to Southern California on Tuesday to see Dr. Lewis Yocum for a second opinion on his sore elbow.

On the disabled list since Tuesday, Tomlin began the season in the Cleveland rotation, but he struggled and was moved to the bullpen in July. He is 5-8 with a 6.36 ERA in 21 games, including 16 starts.

- Carlos Santana was at first base for the Indians on Friday, giving his legs a night off from squatting behind the plate. Santana, 26, has started 71 games at catcher, 17 at first base and 14 at designated hitter.

"He's our catcher right now," Acta said on Friday. "I'm not going to speculate about what he can become in the future. That's not even discussed. He's our catcher right now."

A's: Dental procedure slows Reddick

Right fielder Josh Reddick, who leads the A's with 25 home runs, was out of the starting lineup for Friday night's game against Cleveland because of complications stemming from a tooth extraction on Monday.

Reddick had another dental procedure on Friday, A's manager Bob Melvin said.

"This is becoming quite the issue," Melvin said. "Really yesterday we had him in the lineup to start and put him into the DH role because it was bothering him.

"Went back to the dentist today and had another procedure in there. Dry socket or whatever they're calling it. It's been a little bit of a problem, but hopefully we'll have him back in the lineup tomorrow."

However, Reddick did pinch-hit in Friday's contest, collecting a single in the eighth inning.

- Outfielder Seth Smith took batting practice and ran the bases before Friday night's game as he continued his rehabilitation from a strained left hamstring. He is eligible to come off the DL on Saturday but won't be activated, Melvin said. Melvin said he wants to see how Smith fares taking batting practice and running for a few days.

Worth noting

- A's left-hander Brett Anderson, who's recovering from Tommy John surgery, will throw a bullpen session at The Coliseum before Saturday's game.

- With a 6-4 loss in Friday's game against the A's, Cleveland is now 25-14 in series openers this season.

Acta comfortable with Santana's current situation

By Jeff Fletcher / Special to MLB.com | 08/17/12 9:40 PM ET

OAKLAND -- Carlos Santana's ability to play first base is a luxury for the Indians, who can give their catcher a night off from squatting while still keeping his bat in the lineup.

Eventually, the question will become whether it's more than a luxury, but a necessity.

However, Manny Acta isn't ready to suggest when, or if, Santana will move permanently from behind the plate to keep him healthy.

"He's our catcher right now," Acta said on Friday. "I'm not going to speculate about what he can become in the future. That's not even discussed. He's our catcher right now."

Santana, 26, has started 71 games at catcher, 17 at first base and 14 at designated hitter. As the cleanup hitter, he's a valuable cog in their lineup. They already experienced life without him in 2010, when he missed most of the season after being injured in a home-plate collision.

For now, Acta sees no problem with continuing with the status quo.

"It's nice," he said. "It gives you that versatility that you like to have. ... On the days I want him to rest his legs, having him at first base helps. It works for him and works for us."

Acta credits confidence for Carrera's turnaround

OAKLAND -- Ezequiel Carrera is proof of how much difference a new attitude and a little experience can make.

The 25-year-old Indians outfielder is hitting .389 in 13 games since he was recalled a couple of weeks ago. When Carrera was in the Majors last year, he hit .243 in 68 games.

The difference?

"I think he is more relaxed this time around," Indians Manager Manny Acta said. "Last year when he was up here, he was not so secure, by himself, looking over his shoulder and thinking he was being evaluated game to game. This time he came up and he knew he was going to have a legit opportunity to get more playing time so he has been able to play better."

Carrera, who came to the Indians in the Russell Branyan trade two years ago, is a left-handed-swinging slap hitter. So far, he's played primarily against right-handed pitchers. The Indians sat him on Friday in favor of Jason Donald -- for just his second big league game in the outfield -- to get another right-handed bat in the lineup against A's left-hander Tommy Milone.

Still, Acta said that Carrera can work himself into playing against lefties.

"He's got the ability to do that," Acta said. "It's going to be up to him. He's going to get a chance. He's going to play a lot before the year is over."

Tomlin getting second opinion on sore elbow

OAKLAND -- Indians right-hander Josh Tomlin will travel to Southern California on Tuesday to see Dr. Lewis Yocum for a second opinion on his sore elbow.

Tomlin has been on the disabled list since Tuesday.

Tomlin, 27, began the season in the Cleveland rotation, but he struggled and was moved to the bullpen in July. He is 5-8 with a 6.36 ERA in 21 games, including 16 starts.

Indians notebook: Josh Tomlin seeks second opinion on ailing elbow

Sheldon Ocker

OAKLAND, CALIF.: Josh Tomlin will seek a second opinion about his aching right elbow on Tuesday from Los Angeles Angels team doctor Lewis Yocum.

No mention has been made of surgery as the recommended treatment, but if an operation is the best course of action, Tomlin might remain in California for a surgical procedure.

Tomlin revealed after his last appearance Aug. 12 that his elbow had been hurting off and on for a month and maybe longer. That would explain his erratic season and why he had to be removed from the rotation and put in the bullpen.

DONALD RIGHT FOR LEFT — Jason Donald is thought of as a utility infielder who can play second, third and short. But he also learned to play the outfield at Triple-A Columbus, so manager Manny Acta installed him in left Friday night.

"It's something he did in Triple-A," Acta said. "And we have him out there to hit against left-handed pitching."

FARM FACTS — T.J. McFarland (6-6, 4.75 ERA) gave up one run, six hits and one walk in seven innings, as Columbus defeated Durham 7-1. Russ Canzler hit his 18th home run of the season and doubled; Cord Phelps hit his 15th homer of the year, doubled, singled twice and drove in five runs, and Gregorio Petit hit his ninth home run of the season ... Ronny Rodriguez hit his 16th home run of the season, singled twice and had three RBI, but Carolina lost to Myrtle Beach 5-4 in Class A. ... Jake Lowery had two hits and two RBI, and Alex Lavisky hit his 10th homer of the year in Lake County's 12-6 loss to Dayton in Class A. ... Robel Garcia had a double, two singles and one RBI in Mahoning Valley's 12-5 loss to Auburn in Class A.

— Sheldon Ocker/Akron Beacon Journal LOADED: 08.18.2012

Indians report: Pitcher's mounds supposedly uniform but are not the same

By Sheldon Ocker

OAKLAND, Calif.: Nobody talks about the impact of the pitcher's mound on a game.

After all, they are just there. Every ballpark has one, and pitcher's mounds are not exactly an intriguing topic. They are required to be the same height with the same downward slant toward the plate, so what's there to discuss?

Different pitchers create different take-off indentations at the front edge of the rubber and hollow out different landing areas in that dirt.

"All mounds are different," Indians starter Justin Masterson said. "I'm a pretty big digger, as far as the landing spot is concerned. The starter sets the tone. It's more of a problem for relievers."

By the time a reliever usually enters the game, the takeoff and landing holes are set, and he might be stuck with an uncomfortable situation.

"Big guys like Masterson tear up the mound pretty good," setup man Vinnie Pestano said. "A lot of time your toe gets in a hole and you land in a hole. The worst for me last year was Oakland; I would land in an enormous hole.

"This year, it's been a little better. I like to pitch in Anaheim a lot. The mound is one of the better ones around. It keeps its shape. They say they're all the same, but they're not."

Sometimes opposing pitchers neutralize the divots they take out of the dirt.

"John Danks and I are kind of the same, even though he's a lefty and I'm a righty," Masterson said. "My toe digs the dirt out [in front of the rubber] and he tries to fill it in."

And maybe dirt isn't just dirt.

"Milwaukee and Atlanta seem like they're all clay," said Joe Smith, the Tribe's seventh-inning specialist. "Other places mix in a lot of dirt."

But the composition of the dirt and the variety of holes made by different pitchers aren't the only things that make one mound different from another. Though the slope is alleged to be the same for each pitching surface, it's virtually impossible to maintain that kind of uniformity.

"They say they're all supposed to be the same, but they're not," Pestano said. "If the slope isn't quite right, it can be tough to get on top of the ball."

Pitchers even notice relatively tiny differences in the rubber. According to Masterson, some rubbers aren't centered precisely toward home plate.

"Every once in awhile you'll get a rubber that's not exactly facing the plate," he said. "It's just a little off."

Smith has a little different complaint.

"I hate pitching in U.S. Cellular Field," he said. "Half of the rubber is angled down instead of being flat. All you can do is try to move some place where you feel more comfortable."

Another thing pitchers notice when they are standing on the mound is the background. It's no secret that hitters are sensitive to what they are looking at behind center field. But who thinks about what a pitcher sees behind the catcher? Pestano, for one.

"At some ballparks, the catcher is farther from the stands [behind him] than at other parks," he said. "In Oakland, it seems like the plate is about 120 feet from the stands; in Anaheim it seems like it's about 40 feet. When the distance is shorter, you feel like you're right on top of the hitter, which is a good thing."

Things like a muddy pitcher's mound or holes that have been dug too deep by one pitcher to the discomfort of another can be repaired by the grounds crew. But pitchers seldom summon them for help.

"The other teams' guys are OK with it," Pestano said. "So you don't want to be the guy who calls out the grounds crew."

Tribe blows four-run lead in loss to Athletics

By Sheldon Ocker

OAKLAND, Calif.: As the surprise team of the American League, the Athletics have something to play for: the postseason. They might be too far behind the Rangers to win the Western Division title, but they remain in the wild card race.

Moreover, they had the good fortune to start left-hander Tommy Milone tonight. Nuff said. Final score: A's 6, Indians 4.

That put another dent in the Tribe's record (14-26) when the club is opposed by a left-handed starter.

Milone did his job, but the real hero of the game for the Athletics was third baseman Josh Donaldson, who came into the game with a .167 batting average and eight RBI in 108 at-bats.

"Somebody has to bat at the bottom of the order," manager Manny Acta said. "These guys are all in the big leagues. He hit everybody."

Donaldson amassed three singles and a double and drove in two runs, including the game winner in the eighth.

One bad play in the field and one swing of the bat by Shelley Duncan gave the Indians command of the game in the fourth inning. But in a matter of minutes, command turned into a bare-bones lead.

The fourth inning began with Milone issuing a walk to Carlos Santana. Michael Brantley followed with a routine fly to short left. Shortstop Cliff Pennington retreated, left fielder Yoenis Cespedes sort of tiptoed in, even though he was obviously in better position to make the catch.

In the end, the ball fell between them and Cespedes was charged with an error that put runners on first and second. Jason Donald followed with a single that loaded the bases, which usually is a bad omen. Coming into the game, the Tribe was batting .202 when the bases are full.

This time, Duncan whacked a 3-and-2 pitch over the wall in left for the first grand slam of his career, giving the Indians a 4-0 lead.

"Our strategy was to get through the fifth with that lead and then use our bullpen," Acta said. "But we couldn't keep them down."

Zach McAllister held Oakland scoreless for three innings, giving up three hits but inducing six ground outs and striking out two. But when the Tribe scored, either the A's got tougher at the plate or McAllister became more vulnerable.

Chris Carter led off with a single and Brandon Moss drew the first walk of the game of McAllister. After Jonny Gomes struck out for the second time, Josh Donaldson doubled home one run, leaving runners on second and third. Derek Norris' ground out to third scored a second run, and Pennington's single drove in the third of the inning.

"Zach threw OK, but he couldn't get that shutdown inning and let them back in the game," Acta said. "He battled, but his off-speed pitches were not as effective, and he wasn't as tough on right-handed batters. Usually he's lights out against them."

In the fifth inning, the Athletics tied the score, mostly because of inattention to Cespedes, who doubled with one out. Cespedes got in prime position by executing an easy steal of third. He scored on Carter's sacrifice fly. Moss struck out to end the inning, making the stolen base the key play of the inning.

"I have to do a better job of holding runners and minimizing damage," McAllister said.

McAllister pitched through the sixth, allowing eight hits and one walk, while striking out six. He did give up another run after the score was tied.

Milone lasted five innings, giving up nothing after Duncan's blast. He yielded six hits and one walk, striking out six. One of his four runs he allowed was unearned.

Donaldson came through again in the eighth to snap the tie. Joe Smith began the inning for the Indians by walking Carter and giving up a single to Moss. Vinnie Pestano rushed to the rescue, but pinch hitter Josh Reddick's bloop fell for a single to load the bases, bringing up Donaldson, who singled home Carter with the go-ahead run. Pennington's sacrifice fly scored the final Oakland run.

Acta cited walks as the key element in the defeat. The A's rally in the fourth began with a walk and so did the rally in the eighth.

"We've allowed more runs than anybody," Acta said. "I think there's a correlation between that and walks."

Tribe pitchers have walked more batters than any staff in the American League.

The Tribe's number is up: Cleveland Indians daily briefing

Paul Hoynes

OAKLAND, Calif. -- The Indians have 44 games left in the regular season entering Friday's series opener against the A's at the O.co Coliseum. It's time to get realistic about where they stand.

Just where might that be? Try out in the cold. The real cold.

They are 11 1/2 games out of first place in the AL Central. It's their biggest deficit of the season. In the race for the wild card, Baltimore and Tampa are tied for the first two spots. The Indians are 10 games behind the leaders.

It's over. It has been over since the 11-game losing streak from July 27 through Aug. 6. The streak dropped the Tribe from 3 1/2 games out of first place to 10 1/2 out.

But just to make sure everyone is on the same page: To finish .500, the Indians would have to go 27-17. Raise your hand if you think this team is going to play .614 ball from here through Oct. 3.

To finish with 85 wins, the Indians would have to go 31-13. This from a team that has yet to win more than four games in a row this season.

Here's one more. To finish with 90 wins, the Tribe would have to play .818 (36-8) ball the rest of the way.

There is always another game in baseball, but eventually the numbers catch up to every team. Consider the Indians caught.

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Punchless offense reaffirms Manny Acta's concerns for 2013: Cleveland Indians Insider

Paul Hoynes

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Manny Acta wasn't nearly as talkative Friday night as he was earlier in the week when asked about the needs of the Indians' offense headed toward 2013.

During the first stop of this nine-game, 10-day West Coast trip in Anaheim, Calif., Acta said it was no secret that the Indians had to find a solution in left field, first base, designated hitter and, perhaps, third base. Acta was asked before Friday's game if all those areas could be addressed during the off-season.

"I'm not going to comment on that," said Acta.

Whether someone above him in the team's chain of command was unhappy with his comments is not known, but he certainly wasn't revealing any trade secrets.

The offense has been a work in slow motion all year. In the American League they're ranked ninth in runs (501), average (.253) and hits (1,012), seventh in doubles (206), 11th in homers (107), seventh in on-base percentage (.325) and 11th in slugging percentage (.394).

Since the All-Star break, the Indians are averaging 3.5 runs per game.

Here's a closer look at the positions Acta talked about:

- Left field: Departed Johnny Damon started 52 games and it's hard to remember any of them. Shelley Duncan has started 50 games.

Ezequiel Carrera has been getting a lot of playing time lately, but Jason Donald made his debut Friday because Acta wanted another right-handed bat in the lineup against A's lefty Tommy Milone.

Tribe left fielders rank last in the AL in runs (48), 13th in average (.221), 11th in homers (10) and 13th in RBI (44).

- First base: Casey Kotchman is the main first baseman, starting 94 games. He's hitting .226 (79-for-349) with 11 homers and 42 RBI. Carlos Santana made his 17th start at first Friday, but he's still considered the Tribe's starting catcher.

Jose Lopez and Matt LaPorta have also played first. LaPorta is at Class AAA Columbus and Lopez was released. Tribe first basemen rank 11th in runs (53) and average (.233), 10th in homers (16) and seventh in RBI (58).

- Third base: Jack Hannahan has started 62 games. Brent Lillibridge made his sixth start Friday, while Donald has made four starts at the hot corner. Injured Lonnie Chisenhall (right ulna) and Lopez also started games at third.

Tribe third basemen rank 14th in runs (39), eighth in average (.256), 13th in homers (nine) and 10th in RBI (55).

- Designated hitter: Injured Travis Hafner has been the primary DH with 56 starts. Santana is next in line, but Acta has used 10 players there. Tribe DHs rank 11th in runs (47), 12th in average (.231), seventh in homers (18) and 11th in RBI (52).

Another opinion: Right-hander Josh Tomlin will be in Los Angeles on Tuesday to get a second opinion on his right elbow from Dr. Lewis Yocum.

Tomlin was placed on the disabled list to make room for Roberto Hernandez on the 25-man roster. Tomlin is 5-8 with a 6.36 ERA in 21 games, including 16 starts. Late last season Tomlin was shut down with pain in his right elbow. He's been pitching on and off with the same kind of pain this year.

Indians Chatter

Clubhouse confidential: Jason Donald, an infielder by trade, made his first start in left field Friday night with the Indians. It was his second appearance in left this year, the first coming on April 24.

"It's something that he did in Triple-A," said manager Manny Acta. "That's why we sent him down there, to make him more versatile. Obviously, we like to have his bat in there against left-handed pitching."

Oakland started rookie lefty Tommy Milone on Friday.

Donald is hitting only .176 (6-for-34) with one homer and four RBI against lefties this year. In his career, he's a .297 (49-for-165) hitter against lefties.

Talk, talk: Before the July 31 non-waiver deadline, the Indians and Cubs spent a lot of time talking about various deals. The Indians expressed interest in first baseman Bryan LeHair, a big left-handed hitter.

Two of the players the Cubs showed interest in were left-hander Nick Hagadone and catcher Lou Marson.

Stat of the day: Rookie Cody Allen has started his big-league career with 11 1/3 consecutive scoreless innings in relief. It's the longest streak by an Indians rookie reliever to open his career since Tom Waddell went 12 1/3 scoreless innings in 1984.

-- Paul Hoynes

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Cleveland Indians' good start dissolves into another road loss, 6-4 to Oakland A's

Paul Hoynes

OAKLAND, Calif. — Sometimes good things are just too good to believe.

Maybe that was Zach McAllister's problem Friday night at O.com Coliseum. Shelley Duncan hit a grand slam to give him a 4-0 lead, but the rookie right-hander squandered it almost as quickly as he received it. McAllister wasn't around when Oakland beat the Indians, 6-4, but losing that four-run lead didn't help matters for manager Manny Acta's listing ballclub.

The A's, masters of the walkoff victory this season, struck one inning ahead of schedule to hand the Indians their 16th loss in the past 20 games. Joe Smith, who got a big out in the seventh inning, didn't do well in the eighth.

Smith (7-3) walked Chris Carter to start the eighth and gave up a single to Brandon Moss. When Josh Reddick, a left-handed hitter, pinch-hit for Jonny Gomes, Vinnie Pestano relieved and gave up a bloop single to load the bases. Josh Donaldson followed with his fourth straight hit to break the 4-4 tie.

Cliff Pennington followed with a one-out sacrifice fly to Shin-Soo Choo in right field. Moss scored on a close play. This season Pestano has allowed just three of 18 inherited runners to score.

The win went to Jordan Norberto (4-1). Grant Balfour pitched the ninth for his 10th save.

"I was ahead of both those guys, 0-2, in the eighth and couldn't put them away," said Smith. "Sometimes you're going to blow one and I blew this one tonight."

Choo gave the Indians a chance to break the tie the eighth. After being hit by a pitch by Norberto, he advanced to second on a fly ball. But Norberto struck out Michael Brantley and retired Jason Donald on a soft liner to first.

The Indians are hitting .219 (55-for-251) with runners in scoring position since the All-Star break. Is it any wonder they're 10-24 since the break?

Duncan gave the Indians a 4-0 lead with the first grand slam of his career. Duncan hit a 3-2 pitch over the fence in left with one out in the fourth off lefty Tommy Milone. It was just the second slam the Indians have hit this year.

Carlos Santana started the inning with a walk. Brantley hit a single that left fielder Yoenis Cespedes lost in the twilight. It was originally ruled an error, but the official scorer changed the play after the game. Donald followed with a single to load the bases.

Duncan has 11 homers, five against lefties.

"You're hoping those runs will get the team going, that it will create some momentum to carry over into the rest of the game," said Duncan. "But that was the only bad inning Milone had and their bullpen was great."

It did not take long for the A's to tie the score.

McAllister, after pitching three scoreless innings, gave up three runs in the fourth. Carter singled and Brandon Moss walked to start the inning. After Gomes struck out, Josh Donaldson doubled to score Carter and send Moss to third.

With the infield playing back, Derek Norris sent a grounder to third as Moss came home and Brent Lillibridge threw to first for the second out. Pennington, struggling to hit McAllister's 95 mph fastball, sent an 83 mph breaking pitch into right field for a single to make it 4-3.

To put it mildly, it was not a good time to throw Pennington an off-speed pitch.

"I can't expect this guy, who just came up from Triple-A, to pitch like a 10-year veteran," said Acta. "He made some mistakes on pitch selection. That one really hurt because it came after two out and he had thrown the ball by him in the at bat before that."

The A's tied it, 4-4, in the fifth and a stolen base proved to be critical.

Jason Donald, making his first start in left field, made a great sliding catch in foul territory to retire Jemile Weeks to start the inning. Cespedes, the next hitter, doubled past third. With Carter batting, Cespedes easily stole third and scored on Carter's sacrifice fly to center.

Cespedes came into the game hitting .368 (42-for-114), the second-highest average in the American League since the All-Star break. The steal was his 11th.

"That's another thing some of our young pitchers have to improve upon," said Acta. "We have two of the best throwing catchers in the league over the last two years. We're not doing a very good job of holding runners.

"He needs some work on that, but I'm not expecting to have a finished product in his first year up here."

McAllister was clearly frustrated by his performance.

"A 4-0 lead is a nice thing to have," said McAllister. "Every pitcher wants to go out and put up a zero after that, get the guys back in the dugouts and score more runs. It's frustrating when you're not able to do that."

The Indians squeezed Milone, facing them for the first time, for 95 pitches in five innings.

Asdrubal Cabrera doubled with one out in the first, but Shin-Soo Choo flied out to left and Santana grounded out.

Brantley started the second with a single, but Milone retired the next three batters. Milone allowed four runs, three earned, on six hits in five innings.

McAllister pitched out of trouble in the second. Josh Donaldson singled and went to third as Derek Norris doubled off the fence in left field. He struck out Pennington to end the inning.

McAllister allowed four runs on eight hits. He threw 91 pitches, 63 for strikes, including six strikeouts and one walk.

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Clippers 4, Bulls 3: Win lifts Clippers' spirits

By Jim Massie The Columbus Dispatch Saturday August 18, 2012 5:57 AM

Baseball, as theater, came down to the final act and out last night at Huntington Park, and the Clippers finished to a standing ovation when Scott Barnes closed out a 4-3 victory over the Durham Bulls with a strikeout of Chris Gimenez.

Barnes (2-3) pumped his fist and yelled as his teammates spilled out of the dugout to celebrate the come-from-behind victory. With 17 games left in the regular season, the Clippers are focused on the International League wild-card spot for the playoffs.

"Absolutely we are," Barnes said. "What have we got to lose? We're just taking it game to game. That's how we've been doing things the entire season. Hopefully, it works out."

The Clippers, who head to Louisville today to begin a four-game series against the Bats, are just 2½ games behind wild-card leader Pawtucket and 1½ behind Lehigh Valley.

"Hey, if we play the baseball we're capable of playing consistently, we're going to be right there," designated hitter Russ Canzler said.

The Clippers trailed 3-2 in the eighth inning when Cord Phelps tied the score with a home run off Brandon Gomes (5-4). Canzler made it back-to-back homers with a second shot off Gomes.

The victory felt even better because the Bulls had stunned the Clippers 9-7 on Wednesday night with a seven-run eighth inning. A wild Barnes allowed five of those runs while getting one out.

His presence on the mound for the final 11/3 innings last night made manager Mike Sarbaugh smile.

"For us to come back and play the way we have the last two nights I think says something about the guys," Sarbaugh said, noting the Clippers' 6-1 victory on Thursday. "They come to play every night. And for Scott to get out there against the team that did that to him ... it couldn't have been better for him."

The Clippers have changed drastically over the past few weeks because of the needs of the parent Cleveland Indians.

"We can't look at that," Sarbaugh said. "We have to look at the players we have now. Yeah, it would be great to have everybody that started the year here. But we know that's never going to happen. We're here to develop players to help the big-league club."

Matt Packer, who replaced Chris Seddon in the rotation, pitched 51/3 innings and allowed two runs. Juan Diaz, like Packer a call-up from double-A Akron, smacked a two-run home run in the fifth inning off Chris Archer.

"The new guys are great," Canzler said. "Matt has been throwing the ball really well for us. All the guys are impressed with him, and Diaz hit a huge home run tonight to get us going."

"Everyone is excited about him being here. I think he's going to make us a better team down the stretch. I think it's a testament to our team where we're trying to get back into the wild card. It's the kind of ball we want to be playing."

The Bulls threatened in the ninth on a leadoff single by Rich Thompson. Barnes struck out Tim Beckham, which brought Gimenez to the plate.

Barnes fell behind in the count 3-0, but he picked Thompson off first base.

"It was one of those plays where he could have been (stealing)," Barnes said. "He's a real quick guy, and I thought I'd keep him honest. I just caught him off guard."

Indians let four-run lead slip away, fall to A's

by Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Even when Cleveland pitchers keep the walks to a minimum, they still seem to cause maximum damage.

Josh Donaldson hit a tiebreaking single with the bases loaded in the eighth inning and the Oakland Athletics rallied from four runs down to beat the Indians 6-4 on Friday night.

Shelley Duncan spotted Indians' starter Zach McAllister to a 4-0 lead in the fourth inning with his first career grand slam but a walk to Brandon Moss in the bottom of the inning sparked a three-run A's rally.

"The walks continue to hurt us," Indians' manager Manny Acta said. "There may have only been one or two but they both led to rallies."

The Indians lead the AL with 415 walks issued. They also lead in runs allowed with 618.

"There's a correlation there," Acta said. "You've got to make them hit their way on."

In the eighth, Joe Smith (7-3) walked Chris Carter to lead off the inning. He scored the go-ahead run.

"You have to be able to put people away," Smith said. "When you give us the ball we've been pretty good all year. I blew it tonight but if they give me the ball tomorrow I'll go out and battle."

The A's pulled within five games of first-place Texas in the AL West and a half-game of the second wild-card spot.

Asdrubal Cabrera had two hits for the Indians, who lost their third straight and fell to 10-24 since the All-Star Break.

"It seems like a lot of losses have been more frustrating than others," Duncan said. "We need to turn this thing around."

Cleveland managed only one hit and two baserunners following Duncan's grand slam off Milone in the fourth.

Carlos Santana walked leading off the first and went to second when Cespedes misplayed Michael Brantley's fly ball to left for an error. Jason Donald followed with a single to load the bases before Duncan hit a 3-2 pitch from Milone into the stands above the left-field scoreboard.

It was Duncan's 11th home run this season but only his fourth in August. The designated hitter went into the game batting .107 this month. He's hitting .175 (11 for 63) with runners in scoring position, but those 11 hits have produced 19 RBIs.

Cleveland starter Zach McAllister, who began the season with Triple-A Columbus, couldn't make the four-run lead hold up. The right-hander had six strikeouts and one walk but pitched with runners on base in every inning.

Notable

- Acta said he expects to bring up at least one starter when rosters expand in September.
- Cleveland slugger Travis Hafner, on the disabled list since Aug. 6, continues to rest after receiving an injection in his lower back last week. The Indians have no timetable for his return.
- RHP Bartolo Colon (9-9), who pitches for Oakland today, has a 2.47 ERA since coming off the disabled list July 3. RHP Corey Kluber (0-1) pitches the middle game for Cleveland in his fifth start this season.

BoSox's woes deeper than doomed Bobby V

Ken Rosenthal

Of course Bobby Valentine should be fired. Some rival executives say the Red Sox should have fired him as manager two weeks ago, when they had a better chance of salvaging their season.

For all of the Sox's recent complaints about media leaks, Valentine has been his own worst enemy, failing to keep his mouth shut, inflaming his players, losing their respect. While the players in some cases were guilty of overreaction, Valentine should have known his reputation preceded him. Whatever. At this point, even with the Sox committed to him for the rest of the season, Bobby V is but a sideshow, a footnote to an ugly period in Sox history.

The Sox — 12 1/2 games back in the AL East, 6 1/2 games behind in the race for the second wild card — are not simply bordering on irrelevance as they visit Yankee Stadium this weekend (Saturday, MLB on Fox, 4:10 p.m. ET). They are a collective failure, and the sooner their owners and players recognize that, the sooner they all can move forward.

At present, both groups remain in spin mode, the players denying they tried to mutiny against Valentine, as reported by Jeff Passan of Yahoo! Sports, and club president Larry Lucchino telling reporters Thursday night in Baltimore, "The cynical, jaded media do not necessarily capture the voice of the fan base."

Really? Lucchino should open Fenway Park for a town-hall meeting and listen to what fans (many? most? all?) think of the 2012 Red Sox. And, since the Sox are so big on group discussions, ownership should require the players to attend and hear how they've alienated Red Sox Nation every bit as much as Valentine has alienated them. Then ownership can do something completely different, and acknowledge its own role in helping create this mess.

The facts are these: Valentine became the manager only this season. The Red Sox haven't won a playoff game since 2008 or reached the postseason since '09. They're currently three games below .500 with a \$180 million payroll, the third-highest in the majors.

Few blame first-year general manager Ben Cherington, and few should. The players too often are distracted by side issues, failing to focus their energy on winning. The owners — and specifically, Lucchino — must acknowledge their mistake in overruling Cherington, anointing Valentine and effectively punting on 2012 by hiring the wrong guy at the wrong time.

Less than a year ago — remember? — this franchise showed only the smallest signs of dysfunction. The Sox had the best record in the American League last Sept. 1. Though some club officials privately expressed concern even then that certain players were demonstrating an inflated sense of entitlement, a third World Series appearance in eight years appeared within reach.

Then came the nervous breakdown.

The historic collapse and failure to reach the postseason. The reflexive purge by ownership, which included the dumping of manager Terry Francona and departure of GM Theo Epstein. The revelation that starting pitchers had downed fried chicken and beer in the clubhouse during games — and the smearing of Francona by unnamed sources in a Boston Globe article.

The Atlanta Braves collapsed just as dramatically as the Red Sox last September, but all they did was fire their hitting coach. The New York Yankees play in a market that, at the very least, is as demanding as Boston, yet their players conduct themselves with such professionalism, the contrast is embarrassing to the Red Sox.

The Red Sox's ownership trio of John Henry, Tom Werner and Lucchino doesn't necessarily need to mimic the Yankees' stoic Hal Steinbrenner — the Sox group, lest anyone forget, helped end the "Curse of the Bambino," presiding over World Series winners in '04 and '07. But if they won't allow Cherington to pick the manager, then he shouldn't be GM — and the owners can't say that Cherington hasn't earned their trust, not when he has been in the organization 14 years.

Oh, and let's not stop there.

The next time the players start complaining — and there will be a next time, even after Valentine is gone — the owners should tell them to shut up and stop acting like spoiled children. Spoiled, overpaid, underperforming children who should be seen and not heard.

A year ago, no one thought of first baseman Adrian Gonzalez and second baseman Dustin Pedroia as problems, and maybe they still are not. But Gonzalez and Pedroia led the uprising against Valentine, according to Yahoo! Regardless of whether every last detail of Passan's report was accurate, no one will confuse either veteran for a Valentine infantryman.

MONSTER BASH

The Red Sox have kicked off a yearlong celebration of Fenway Park's 100th anniversary.

The players, whether they realize it or not, all are diminished by the team's internal strife. The Red Sox's championship teams cared only about winning. This team seemingly is concerned with everything but. Obviously, leaders such as Derek Jeter are rare, but who on the Red Sox even comes close to setting that kind of tone?

Gonzalez never has been known as a leader. Pedroia was Francona's pet (for good reason), but he is not hitting the way he has in the past, perhaps due to nagging physical issues. Designated hitter David Ortiz, at times, is a unifying force. Other times, he prefers to bitch about his contract.

Yet, virtually every Red Sox player has won in the past, and been a good teammate in the past. Perhaps the hiring of a more respected manager quickly would restore the proper clubhouse dynamic. But at least to some degree, a culture change is required. The team's agenda should be winning, and winning only.

The defiant one, right-hander Josh Beckett, should be the first player traded, though the Sox might have blown their best chance to move him when the Texas Rangers showed interest at the non-waiver deadline; Beckett is earning \$15.75 million through 2014 and can veto any deal as a player with 10 years of service, the last five with the same team.

Center fielder Jacoby Ellsbury also needs to go, ideally for a starting pitcher, if only because of his contractual status and the potential for the Sox to replace him with top prospect Jackie Bradley. Ellsbury will be entering the final year of his contract in '13, and his agent, Scott Boras, generally prefers his clients to determine their values on the open market.

After that, things gets trickier.

Epstein left Cherington with two players whose hefty contracts and shaky physical conditions make them extremely difficult to trade — left fielder Carl Crawford and right-hander John Lackey.

The Sox discussed Gonzalez with the Los Angeles Dodgers at the deadline, according to the Boston Globe, but would move him only in a “transformative” deal, one major league source says. Pedroia is under club control through 2015 at reasonable salaries, but it would be counter-productive to trade him when his value is down.

Cherington, left with little choice, probably should take his chances with the same core. Pedroia, left-hander Jon Lester and right-hander Clay Buchholz all are under 30, and Gonzalez only turned that age in May.

The Sox, drawing from a more favorable aspect of Epstein’s legacy, also are developing another wave of young talent: Left-hander Felix Doubront and third baseman Will Middlebrooks made impacts this season, catcher Ryan Lavanway is back in the majors and Bradley and shortstops Jose Iglesias and Xander Bogaerts are getting close.

If only the immediate future were as bright.

There’s no getting around that the Sox blew it with Valentine. They will need to fire him if they want to retain their holdover coaches — bench coach Tim Bogar, hitting coach Dave Magadan, bullpen coach Gary Tuck. But if they fire Valentine after the first year of his two-year deal, they likely will forfeit any chance of hiring their former pitching coach, John Farrell, as their next manager. Farrell’s contract as Toronto Blue Jays manager does not expire until after next season.

A fine mess, isn’t it?

Valentine must go; Valentine will go.

But Valentine, in some ways, is the least of the Sox’s problems.

Down the stretch they come

By Jayson Stark ESPN.com

What lies ahead is another fabulous baseball stretch drive. And that’s always a beautiful thing.

But what lies ahead is also a stretch drive unlike any other we’ve ever witnessed. You realize that, right?

Adding a second wild-card team in each league -- and a mere one postseason game per league -- might not seem like a revolutionary change. Not on the surface at least.

But the ripple effects of just this one new wrinkle have already begun rattling through the sport (via a trading deadline at which there was an all-time shortage of sellers). And those ripple effects are about to get even more visible and dramatic over the final 40 games of this season.

And we’re not just talking about the fact that this change keeps more teams alive deeper into September, either.

We’re talking about the newfound importance of finishing first under this system.

And the pressure teams will face to get their pitching lined up for that wild-card survival game.

We’re talking, too, about the issues that could be raised by the increased likelihood that multiple teams will have to play tiebreaker games the day after the season.

And the shadow that will be cast by an overstuffed October schedule that could wreak havoc on travel, pitching staffs and the ultimate outcome of a potentially crazy postseason.

Hey, that’s all. Other than that, it ought to be just another nice, normal, run-of-the-mill stretch drive. So let’s take a look at the many storylines that are about to swirl:

Postseason odds

Somebody has to calculate the chances that miracles can happen. Fortunately, our friends at coolstandings.com have played out the last seven weeks of the season a million times. (Better than us.) And they tell us the most likely playoff matchups look like this:

American League:

- Wild-card game: Tigers at Rays
- Division Series: Wild card vs. Yankees (No. 1 seed), White Sox (No. 3) vs. Rangers (No. 2)
- Wild-card odds: Rays (50.6 percent wild card/60.1 percent of making playoffs), Tigers (30.5/59.2 percent), Athletics (31.8/43.9 percent), Angels (22.1/28.0 percent), Orioles (19.7/21.6 percent), Red Sox (6.2/6.7 percent).
- First-place team most likely to wind up in the wild-card scramble: White Sox.

National League:

- Wild-card game: Cardinals at Braves
- Division Series: Wild card vs. Nationals (No. 1 seed), Dodgers (No. 3) vs. Reds (No. 2)
- Wild-card odds: Braves (62.7 percent wild card/93.7 percent of making playoffs), Cardinals (46.9/58.0 percent), Pirates (34.2/40.9 percent), Giants (4.7/47.9 percent), Diamondbacks (2.5/16.0 percent).
- First-place team most likely to wind up in the wild-card scramble: Dodgers

What it will take

Coolstandings estimates it will take 90 wins for a team to qualify as the second wild card in the National League, but only 86 in the American League. So here are the records the clubs deemed to have at least a 5 percent chance would need to rack up the rest of the way:

American League:

- Orioles: 22-22
- Rays: 22-22
- Tigers: 23-21
- Athletics: 24-21
- Angels: 24-19
- Red Sox: 25-15

National League:

- Braves: 22-22
- Cardinals: 26-18
- Pirates: 25-19
- Giants: 26-18
- Diamondbacks: 31-13

One thing we know about projections is that they come with no money-back guarantees. But it's interesting to note that, while it seems implausible now that the Red Sox could climb over all those teams, you know what the Cardinals' record was last year in their final 40 games? An identical 25-15. So, ya never know. The pressure to win

Too many times in too many Septembers the past few years we've seen playoff-bound teams, heading for the finish line, that didn't even care if they finished first. And why would they?

Under the old rules, the only penalty a wild-card team faced in October was playing one fewer home game in each of the first two rounds. And that was such a big deal that four of the past 10 World Series winners were wild-card teams. So whoop-de-do.

Chipper Jones

Chipper Jones, who homered twice on Thursday night against the Padres, aims for his 12th and final postseason appearance.

But those days are done, friends. Winning matters again -- more than it has at any time in the wild-card era. And you don't even have to take our word for it. Just listen to Chipper Jones:

"I'm not a big advocate of playing 162 games for a one-game playoff," Jones told Rumbings. "You could easily see two teams in the same division have the two best records in the league, and one of them has the luxury of waiting a couple of days to play a best-three-out-of-five [series], while the other one has that one-game playoff. And I don't see that as fair.

"It's basically a Game 7, right off the gut," Jones went on. "It's win or go home -- and three other teams [in that league] get to sit back and watch it. So that's why, at least for the guys in this clubhouse, we're putting the utmost emphasis on every game from here on out. For us, these are must-win games the rest of the way, because we don't want to put all our eggs in one basket, for that one game."

If every team plays it that way, just imagine the drama of this season's final weeks. And while you're at it, imagine the pressure managers will face in trying to figure out the best way to line up their pitching in that final week.

If you're say, Jim Leyland, and the Tigers are a game up on the White Sox on the last day of the season but know they'll be a wild-card team if they lose the division, would you pitch Justin Verlander in that final game to go for first place? Or would you save him in case you need him for a tiebreaker game or a wild-card game? Let the second-guess-a-thon begin!

The madness over the horizon

But as you contemplate your second-guesses, remember, too, that the craziness won't be confined just to the last week of the regular season.

The October calendar is going to be jammed with pressure-packed games before teams ever get to the League Championship Series. And one reason is that there's a greater chance of tiebreaker games this October than ever before -- because virtually all ties now will be decided on the field.

So here's a scenario that's far from out of the question: Say the Dodgers and Giants tie for first in the NL West -- and also tie the Cardinals for the second wild-card spot. You could see a situation in which the Giants would finish the regular season Wednesday (Oct. 3) in Los Angeles, play an NL West tiebreaker game the next day in San Francisco, fly to St. Louis for a wild-card tiebreaker Friday, fly to Atlanta for the wild-card survivor game Saturday, then head back to San Francisco to start the division series on Sunday.

"Oh my god," said an executive of one contender when we laid out that potential travel nightmare. "That's crazy."

Ah, but it's not out of the question, either. And also keep in mind there is now only one travel day built into the division series instead of two -- and no off day between Game 5 of one of the AL Division Series and Game 1 of the AL Championship Series, even though the site of that Game 1 depends on the outcome of Game 5. So what happens if it rains? Don't ask. Please.

Not all wild cards are created equal

Just for perspective's sake, we should point out that not every team would look at getting "stuck" with playing a win-or-go-fishing wild-card game as its worst nightmare. For some teams, in fact, even losing that game would feel like a trip to the World Series.

"There are two teams," said one NL exec, "that place the most importance on playing that one game. And that's the Pirates and the Orioles, just because of what it would mean, going into next season, for ticket sales and the psyche of those cities.

"For a team like Detroit, just to play that one game would be a disaster. For the Angels, for Texas, it's a disaster, because they're out to win it all. But for two teams that could get there and reflect back and say, 'We really had a good year, and there's a lot to be enthused about for next year,' we're talking about the Pirates and the Orioles. Even if they lose that game, nobody in those cities would be complaining."

The rankings

Finally, it's time to ask the question: Who's best built for the wild-card game?

It's a variation on a question we ask every year at this time -- the old "which team is best constructed for October" debate. But when you're looking at a scenario in which one of these wild-card teams is going to have to win a one-or-done postseason game just to survive to play in the LDS, it's an especially fascinating question this year.

So we asked a group of executives and scouts to help us rank all the wild-card contenders (plus the first-place teams with the slimmest leads) in terms of how they would line up for that Survivor Game. Now here are those rankings:

1. Tigers: "Just because of Verlander," said one scout. "He's what you're always looking for to pitch a game like that. Programmed for domination."
2. Angels: "If they're going to throw [Jered] Weaver in that game," said the same scout, "somebody's going to be in for a hell of a challenge."
3. Rays: "Two words: 'David Price,'" said one scout. "But even if they get in a bind where he can't pitch, they're still dangerous. So much pitching depth."
4. White Sox: Would they pitch Jake Peavy or Chris Sale? Folks we surveyed were split. But one scout nominated Peavy: "Veteran presence. Really competes. Not a dominating guy anymore. Just wears you down."
5. Athletics: "Not sure who they'd pitch," said one NL exec. "Maybe [Bartolo] Colon. Maybe [Brandon] McCarthy. They have great pitching, but I'm not sure they have that one dominating guy."
6. Red Sox: "If they had to pick one starter for a game like that," said the same exec, "right now it would have to be Clay Buchholz. And four months ago, you never would have guessed that."
7. Orioles: "At this point," said the same exec, "they'd really only have one option -- [Wei-Yin] Chen. He's the guy who'd give them the best chance to win. But it's tough to rank them above those other teams."

National League:

1. Giants: Their hold on this spot got shakier after the Melky Cabrera suspension. But no NL team has more good rotation options than the Giants, with Matt Cain, Madison Bumgarner and Ryan Vogelsong all having great years. "I'm not sure they'll be able to set up their pitching for that game," said one GM. "But it would be interesting to see how they'd do it if they could."
2. Dodgers: Anybody want to face Clayton Kershaw in a one-game playoff? Didn't think so. "If you had to beat Kershaw and then Kenley Jansen at the end of the game," said one NL exec, "that would be tough sledding."
3. Cardinals: They could run Kyle Lohse (better WHIP than Stephen Strasburg) or Adam Wainwright (4-0, 2.04 ERA in his past five starts) at you, along with the league's deepest lineup. "If you asked me to sit here today and say which so-called 'long shot' can win the World Series, I'd say St. Louis," said one NL GM.

4. Braves: Maybe they lack that classic big-game dominator. "But they could throw Tim Hudson at you for five or six innings," said another GM, "and then kill you with that bullpen at the end."

5. Diamondbacks: "A lot depends on how [Ian] Kennedy is pitching and on Justin Upton," said one NL exec. "If he ever gets hot, he changes their team dramatically."

6. Pirates: "I hate to say this," said one scout, "but I'm counting out Pittsburgh. They just don't have enough pitching."

Ready to Rumble

- For about the 78th consecutive meeting of baseball's problem-solving owners, there was no resolution this week of the A's-Giants standoff. But if it wasn't clear before now, it's more obvious than ever that, in the words of one baseball official, that moving the A's to San Jose is, most likely, "never going to happen."

One sports attorney who has looked into this told Rumbblings that the Giants have "a hell of a case" -- centered around a document signed by the commissioner defining their territorial rights to include San Jose. And that's critical, because any move by the A's, or by the sport, to ignore or override those territorial rights could open a messy can of larvae for baseball.

How? Well, if the Giants' territorial rights were suddenly deemed to no longer apply, it could set a precedent that might inspire some other team to attempt to move to New York or Southern California, by arguing the territorial rights of the Yankees, Mets, Dodgers and Angels were no longer valid, either.

So if the A's aren't bound for San Jose, what is likely to happen to them? Behind the scenes, baseball people are predicting they'll eventually have to give up on this battle and settle for a new, Pittsburgh-size park in Oakland -- and then do their best to beat up on the Giants in interleague play.

- Another item that wasn't on the agenda at this owners meeting was this not-so-hot topic: Who's the next commissioner?

We've often said we expect Bud Selig to be commissioner for life -- if not commissioner beyond life. But not everyone in the sport is so sure anymore.

"I'll tell you what got my attention," said an official of one club. "Bud had a chance to take a five-year extension this time around and didn't take it. And that tells me, this time, when he says he's going to retire, he means it."

So who are some of the names being batted around, just in case Selig ever does step down in three more years -- or 50? A few we've heard: Tigers president David Dombrowski, Diamondbacks president Derrick Hall, Red Sox chairman Tom Werner and baseball's executive vice president for labor relations and human affairs, Rob Manfred.

But it's also possible the sport could look beyond its own population and pursue a business visionary to be named later. Then again, it's also possible Bud will still be in charge six centuries from now. So never mind.

- The Phillies had no trouble ballyhooing Jimmy Rollins' recent ascent to No. 3 (behind only Mike Schmidt and Richie Ashburn) on their all-time games-played list. But he almost never got there.

Executives of multiple clubs that spoke to the Phillies before the trading deadline told Rumbblings the club shopped Rollins extensively to West Coast teams last month. And one exec said he heard the Phillies and Dodgers kicked around a Rollins-for-Dee Gordon swap at one point. But Rollins' contract (\$11 million in each of the next two years, plus an easily vested option for 2015) and Gordon's torn thumb ligament apparently did in those talks.

- Speaking of the Phillies, by our calculations, they subtracted more 2012 payroll dollars (north of \$8 million) in the past three weeks -- by dealing away Shane Victorino, Hunter Pence and Joe Blanton -- than any other club in baseball.

The next-largest subtractors? The Marlins, who dumped slightly less than \$8 million by moving Hanley Ramirez, Omar Infante, Anibal Sanchez, Gaby Sanchez, Randy Choate and Edward Mujica.

Surprisingly, the Astros were able to lop just \$2 million off this year's payroll despite trading players whose 2012 salaries totaled approximately \$48 million, because they sent so much cash along in those trades.

But, on the other hand, the Stros left themselves with exactly one current player (Chris Snyder) who has guaranteed money (\$500,000) coming beyond this year. And, in an even more amazing development, they have only three current players on their entire team making more than \$1 million (Francisco Cordero, Ben Francisco and Jed Lowrie). The Yankees have 20!

- Elsewhere on this site, Dan Szymborski writes that the Melky Cabrera suspension reduced the Giants' probability of winning the NL West from 53 percent to 43 percent. But their schedule is so much easier than the Dodgers' the rest of the way, the Giants might still be the favorites.

The Dodgers and Giants play each other nine times. Other than that, the Giants have only one series (four games against Atlanta) left versus a team that currently has a winning record -- but play 22 games against the four clubs with the most losses in the league (Astros, Cubs, Padres, Rockies).

The Dodgers still have to play the Braves, Cardinals, Nationals and Reds (plus the Giants) and have only 12 games left against the four losingest teams.

Padres

- The Padres never got offered enough before the deadline to trade Chase Headley. And, surprisingly, they're telling teams these days that they might not trade him this winter, either, now that (a) they finally have new owners and (b) Headley's heir apparent at third base, Jedd Gyorko, has played enough second base this year in the minor leagues to convince them he can be a viable Dan Uggla-esque option there in the big leagues.

- It isn't often you see a player who's out for the year traveling with his team. But Chris Carpenter joined the Cardinals on their last road trip. And the reason, he said, was because "they asked me to." They asked him, said GM John Mozeliak, because he's a leader on a team that values leadership and because "he's very competitive, he's very interested in the game of baseball and he can add insights to the game that the average player can't see."

Carpenter's future is still murky following surgery to address thoracic outlet syndrome, a nerve issue in his shoulder that caused him to lose feeling in his arm, face and neck. But he told Rumblings: "I hope to start throwing before the end of the season. I think the only way to be fair to myself, fair to the organization and fair to everyone involved is for all of us to know, going into the winter, whether they can count on me for next year."

And Carpenter is convinced he'll be able to tell, if he's able to throw off a mound even at half-speed, if that's possible: "Once I get up there, I think I'll know if I can or not," he said. "The way it was responding before, with the numbness, I didn't have to throw 100 percent to know if it was going to go numb or tingle. I would think that's still the case. And I think if I can find that answer, that's a good thing. And it's better to find that answer now than wonder about it all winter."

- Finally, even officials of other clubs find themselves talking nonstop about Stephen Strasburg and his approaching Shutdown Day. And one of those officials posed this question recently: Why doesn't baseball do more to help teams with momentous decisions like this?

"If I were sitting in Major League Baseball's seat, I'd be doing everything I could to help the Nationals make as good and as informed a decision as they can," the official said. "I'd be loading them with stats, saying, 'Here are all the studies. Now you make an informed decision. But at least you have the information. Once you have it, you can do it any way you want.'

"It just kind of boggles my mind that that isn't happening. I mean, Stephen Strasburg has to be a huge moneymaker for Major League Baseball and the Nationals, right? So baseball should want the Nationals to get to the playoffs and for him to pitch in the playoffs. Isn't that what Bud Selig is all about? So if that's the case, why wouldn't you do all you can to help them make this decision?"

Excellent question. Don't you think?

MLB to test two new replay systems

By Jayson Stark | ESPN.com

Major League Baseball will begin installing two experimental new replay systems this month at Yankee Stadium and Citi Field in New York to test their viability for reviewing fair/foul calls.

The systems won't be used to reverse or confirm calls at this time, according to MLB officials familiar with the sport's plans. But their installation will enable MLB to determine which system would best fit baseball's needs.

"Hawkeye," the camera-based technology used in tennis, will be tested at Citi Field, both during Mets games in September and on off days. A radar-based system, similar to the technology used to track shots in golf telecasts, will be tested at Yankee Stadium. That technology, officials said, has not previously been used to review calls in any sport.

Baseball also plans to test both systems during the Arizona Fall League and present the results at the next owners meetings in November.

There is no timetable for making a decision on when, or even whether, to begin using one of the two systems to review calls in major-league games, officials said. However, commissioner Bud Selig has said he hopes to expand replay to include fair/foul calls and possibly trap/catch calls as soon as next season.

The use of traditional replay to review calls beyond home runs remains an option, but MLB appears to be leaning toward using more precise technology, as long as that technology proves to be quick and accurate enough to work in baseball.

A's Reddick out again after dental work

Steve Kroner

Right fielder Josh Reddick was not in Friday's starting lineup against Cleveland. Reddick, who had a dental procedure on the off day Monday, had another dental procedure Friday.

"This is becoming quite the issue," A's manager Bob Melvin said in his pregame news conference.

Reddick sat out Wednesday's game in Kansas City and was limited to designated-hitter duty Thursday.

"He's a tough guy," Melvin said. "Believe me, if there was any way he could be out there, he'd be out there."

Reddick leads the A's in homers (25) and RBIs (60), but has struggled lately. He had gone 10-for-71 (.141) with 28 strikeouts over his past 16 games before delivering a pinch-hit single in the eighth inning Friday.

After the game, Reddick said he was feeling better than he has recently. He expected to speak with his dentist Saturday morning before deciding if he could return to right field for Saturday night's game.

20-10 vision: This weekend, the A's are celebrating the 10th anniversary of the 2002 team's 20-game win streak, which set the American League record.

Among those who will participate in an on-field ceremony before Saturday's game is Scott Hatteberg, whose pinch-hit, ninth-inning homer gave the A's win No. 20, 12-11 over Kansas City.

On Friday afternoon, Hatteberg acknowledged that the HR rates as the top moment of his 14-year career. The streak still resonates with him and his teammates.

"It was very much a bonding thing," Hatteberg said. "So, it's something we share, so when we see each other, we remind each other of what was going on during that time, which was pretty special."

Baseball players can be a superstitious lot. Manager Art Howe said he drove the same way to the Coliseum for each game during the streak.

His other nod to superstition: "I always used the same pen for the lineup. I'm glad I didn't run out of ink."

The 2002 A's won the AL West with a 103-59 record, but lost to Minnesota in the Division Series.

"When I look back on that season," reliever Chad Bradford said, "I don't think about (the playoff loss). I think about the 20 wins in a row."

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Donaldson fuels A's 6-4 comeback win

Steve Kroner

Barely on the radar of most A's fans at the beginning of this week, Josh Donaldson became the pivotal man in Oakland's 6-4 victory over Cleveland at the Coliseum on Friday night.

Oakland recalled Donaldson from Triple-A Sacramento on Tuesday when Brandon Inge went on the disabled list. Donaldson went 4-for-4 Friday night, and his RBI single in the eighth inning was the go-ahead hit.

Chris Carter opened the eighth by drawing a walk from Joe Smith (7-3), and Brandon Moss singled Carter to second.

Josh Reddick, who endured another dental procedure Friday, then pinch-hit for designated hitter Jonny Gomes and greeted Vinnie Pestano with a bloop single to left to load the bases.

That set the stage for Donaldson, who went 15-for-98 (.153) in two previous stints with the A's this season. He pulled an up-and-away slider into left field to bring home Carter, and Oakland had its first lead of the night.

Donaldson said he's trying to maintain a more even keel than he did in his other big-league stints this year.

"I've kind of been so amped up that I haven't allowed my abilities to really work," Donaldson said. "I really hurt myself more than helped. I've gone out there with a relaxed mentality, just trying to get a good pitch to hit."

He got enough good pitches to hit in Triple-A that he was batting .335 with the River Cats. That also provided Donaldson with some confidence.

"I'm not saying these guys are Triple-A pitchers by any means," Donaldson said, "but it's just having that mentality, that mind-set, just believing in myself and just allowing my ability to work."

Three A's relievers - Pat Neshek, Jordan Norberto and Grant Balfour - combined for four innings of no-hit relief. Norberto (4-1) picked up the win. Balfour recorded his 10th save.

Tommy Milone had lost his past three starts, giving up at least five earned runs in each of those starts. The A's skipped his turn on the Chicago-K.C. road trip, so Friday night's game was his first since Aug. 5.

The rookie left-hander worked five innings Friday. The first three were scoreless, but Shelley Duncan tagged Milone for a grand slam in the fourth.

One of those runs originally was unearned. Yoenis Céspedes appeared to lose Michael Brantley's routine flyball in the twilight. The ball landed 15 to 20 feet in front of Céspedes, who was charged with an error. Official scorer Michael Duca changed the ruling to a base hit for Brantley after the game.

The A's answered with three runs in the bottom of the inning. Donaldson's RBI double accounted for the first run. Derek Norris drove in a run with a groundout, and Cliff Pennington's two-out single off Zach McAllister brought home Donaldson for a 4-3 game.

Céspedes used his bat and legs to pull the A's even in the fifth. He scorched a one-out double down the left-field line, got a great jump on a steal of third and came home on Carter's sacrifice fly to center.

Since the All-Star break, Oakland is 20-12, the best record in the American League. Since the break, Cleveland is 10-24, the worst mark in the AL.