



Detroit Tigers Clips

Wednesday, October 10, 2012

Detroit Free Press

Once again, Tigers' offense has decided to vanish (Sharp)
Oakland 2, Detroit 0: Athletics' home fans will be treated to Game 4 (Lowe)
Tigers' Avisail Garcia even catching praise from Bob Melvin for big play (Lowe)
Tigers' Anibal Sanchez throws his pitches, delivers strong performance in Game 3 loss (Windsor)
Jim Leyland stresses to Tigers to keep even keel, relax (Windsor)
Athletics make life miserable for opponents at O.co Coliseum (Windsor)
Tigers vs. A's: John Lowe scouts Game 4 pitching matchup (Lowe)
Tigers' Jim Leyland praises Cardinals rookie manager Mike Matheny (Lowe)
Ticker: Tigers were robbed -- well, at least Prince Fielder was -- twice (Schrader)
Oakland A's: The comeback kids of the (AL) West (Windsor)
Oakland 2, Detroit Tigers 0: Brett Anderson, bullpen extend ALDS (Crawford)
Tigers tied with Reds for best odds to win 2012 World Series (Manzullo)

The Detroit News

Tigers fans wise not to push the panic button after Game 3 setback (Henning)
All eyes now turn to Tigers' Game 4 starter Max Scherzer (Gage)
A's manager Bob Melvin: We'll pitch to Miguel Cabrera, Prince Fielder (Henning)
Tigers starter Anibal Sanchez's price tag goes up after outing (Henning)
Tigers still have advantage, but bats' blackout must end (Wojnowski)
Tigers fail to clinch; defense, pitching keep A's hopes alive (Gage)
Manager Jim Leyland stands firm behind those who got the Tigers this far (Henning)
Deficient defensively, Delmon Young not likely a returning Tiger (Gage)
As good as it gets: Baseball pumps new life into postseason (Wojnowski)
Tigers pitcher Al Alburquerque's kissing incident is overblown (Foster)

MLive.com

Grading the Tigers: Lackluster offense continues to haunt Detroit Tigers in Game 3 loss to Oakland A's (Schmehl)
Detroit Tigers still in good shape to advance after Game 3 loss, but offensive struggles are troubling (Iott)
Detroit Tigers manage just four hits, suffer 2-0 loss to Oakland A's in Game 3 of ALDS (Iott)
A's Coco Crisp makes mind-blowing catch to rob Prince Fielder of surefire homer in Game 3 (Schmehl)
Detroit Tigers' Jim Leyland won't discuss job situation, says 'everybody's known' that he wants to manage (Iott)
As expected, Detroit Tigers repeat lineup for Game 3; time announced for potential Game 5 (Schmehl)

Detroit Tigers fans: Al Alburquerque kissing incident was no big deal and won't backfire by inspiring A's (Savage)

Detroit Tigers' Anibal Sanchez aims to bounce back after rough start last month against Oakland A's (Iott)
No doubt A's can rally from 2-0 deficit but they won't do it, says ESPN analyst John Kruk (Savage)

MLB.com

Tigers headed to Game 4 after being shut out (Beck)
Sanchez feels at home in postseason road start (Beck)
Schzer looks to punch Tigers' ticket to ALCS (Bloom)
Tigers waiting for offense to be unleashed (Bloom)
A's turn to Griffin with backs still against wall (Miller)
Leyland confirms desire to continue managing (Beck)

FOXSports.com

Tigers outplayed by upstart A's in Game 3 (Martinez)

USAToday.com

Athletics' pitchers shut down potent Tigers (Ortiz)

CBSSports.com

ALDS Tigers-A's Game 4 preview: Max Scherzer vs. A.J. Griffin (Perry)
A's blank Tigers in must-win: Quick hits (Perry)
Daily Transactions

Once again, Tigers' offense has decided to vanish

October 10, 2012

By Drew Sharp / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- No farewell kiss. Not just yet.

Oakland isn't ready to leave the party, staving off a quick elimination with an emotional surge rarely witnessed in this historically desolate baseball wasteland. Soaring decibels along with soaring outfielders brought the Tigers down to earth, denying them the opportunity for a sweep of their American League Division Series. Despite their 2-0 Game 3 Tuesday night, the Tigers still hold the edge in the best-of-five series, two games to one. But they better be careful. These Athletics have adopted an entertaining knack for turning the impossible into the expected.

"We knew that they were going to come out charged up because of the stakes involved for them," first baseman Prince Fielder said. "They've already proven that they're a great team that keeps fighting hard and never gives up and never gets their heads down."

It was Fielder with the drooped head Tuesday night, amazed that twice Oakland robbed him of hits — one would have been a game-tying home run and the other a potential double. And his was the only Tigers bat that possessed even the tiniest rumble of thunder within.

It figures, doesn't it? The Tigers still lead the series, of course, but they are the ones who should be worried most. It sounds like a broken record, but the Tigers are once again sputtering offensively. Of their eight runs in three games, only one — Alex Avila's home run in Game 1 — scored on a hit. They've scored on catching errors, throwing errors, a double play, a wild pitch, a ground-out dribbler and a sacrifice fly.

The only scoring approach they've missed is having four consecutive batters hit by a pitch.

"Give them credit," Fielder said. "They pitched a great game and made the big plays they had to make. That's what makes this a funny game sometimes. The other day, he struggled to make a catch. But today he made a great catch."

"He" is Oakland centerfielder Coco Crisp, the designated goat of the A's Game 2 loss when he muffed a basket catch on a Miguel Cabrera short fly that scored two runs and flipped the momentum to the Tigers' side.

Crisp made amends in the second inning.

Fielder ripped a shot off A's starter Brett Anderson headed for the fence in right-center, about 390 feet away. Crisp shifted into overdrive, elevating like Michael Jordan from the free-throw line and snatched the ball just as it was clearing the wall.

"Coco gave them a lot of momentum when he took the home run away from Fielder," Tigers manager Jim Leyland said.

Fielder thought he had extra bases again in the seventh inning, a liner that slowly hooked away from leftfielder Yoenis Cespedes. But the stellar rookie from Cuba dove and came up with it.

You knew then that this was going to Oakland's night. The A's are not going away quietly.

"That's baseball," Fielder said. "You don't start mumbling to yourself why you got nothing to show for hitting the ball well. Give them all the credit. They made the plays."

Catcher Gerald Laird had a more succinct description for Fielder's unrewarded bat.

"It sucks," he said.

But Laird also added that whereas Crisp experienced an immediate reversal of defensive fortune, perhaps Fielder's hard luck Tuesday becomes the impetus for him exploding in tonight's Game 4 and providing the signature moment that he really hasn't had in his first year with the Tigers.

As a somber Fielder left the clubhouse, Cabrera shouted to him in Spanish that "it'll be better tomorrow."

Fielder just shrugged.

He's only batting .083 in this series — 1-for-12.

Tigers starter Anibal Sanchez didn't pitch poorly, but his counterpart was masterful in keeping Detroit off-balance.

Anderson had pitched only six times this season after missing more than a calendar year with Tommy John surgery and subsequent painstaking rehabilitation. He last pitched nearly three weeks ago after suffering a

pulled oblique muscle. It was a huge gamble on Oakland manager Bob Melvin's part, staying with a pitcher appreciably rusty for such a desperate starting assignment.

But Melvin figured that his hunches dutifully rewarded him during the A's magical climb to the West Division title.

And in some ways, Anderson perfectly symbolized the A's plight — the frustrated underdog, beaten down but looking to find one remaining spark that could ignite something memorable. Anderson only surrendered two hits through six innings. No Tiger advanced beyond second base during that time.

After each third out, Anderson raced off the mound, skipping over the "Post-Season" insignia so as not to jinx himself. He offered a little fist pump after getting Cabrera out on strikes to end the top of the sixth -- his last batter of the evening.

We're not accustomed to seeing the Oakland Coliseum alive ... at least for baseball anyway. It's normally the Oakland Mausoleum for the A's considering the chronic local indifference from the combined poor play to the team's constant efforts in building a stadium away from Oakland. This wasn't the rowdy street gang convention like a Raiders home game with the Harleys stacked up in the parking lot.

But the seats were filled. And for a change, the majority of the crowd wasn't there supporting the opposition. The PA system played a tune entitled "One More" with the minutes counting down until the first pitch. It was probably orchestrated as a rallying cry for the desperate, but it was only accurate as far as the Tigers were concerned. They needed one more to advance. The Athletics needed one to keep the door from slamming in their face.

The A's delivered the message they wanted.

They're not ready for the kiss-off just yet.

Oakland 2, Detroit 0: Athletics' home fans will be treated to Game 4

October 10, 2012

By John Lowe / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- By the first inning, Tigers first-base coach Tom Brookens already had the thought. Metrodome, 1987.

Brookens was an infielder on the '87 Tigers, who for the first two games of the league championship series entered the Twins' indoor stadium in downtown Minneapolis. The Metrodome crowd was in a full roar for those games, and the Tigers got drowned out in two straight losses. They never caught up in that series.

On Tuesday night, a sellout crowd of 37,090 shouted and implored the A's most of the game as they beat the Tigers, 2-0, to keep them from sweeping the best-of-five first-round series. The A's can tie the series tonight and force a decisive Game 5 Thursday night against Justin Verlander.

"I thought about how loud the Metrodome was," Brookens said. "The fans there didn't out-cheer the ones here, but it was louder there because it was enclosed."

Within this attack of decibels, Jim Leyland detected perfect pitch.

"They pitched and played a perfect game," the Tigers manager said.

Oakland left-hander Brett Anderson and three relievers combined to four-hit the Tigers and hand them their first postseason shutout since the Cardinals beat them, 5-0, in Game 3 of the 2006 World Series.

It was loud, but it wasn't too loud to think. In fact, one could think of another loud California episode like this that determined the Tigers foe in the '84 World Series.

The Cubs went to San Diego with a 2-0 lead that year in the best-of-five championship series. Cheered on by maniacal crowds in a mostly enclosed stadium also used for football (just like the A's home field, the Coliseum), the Padres won the next two games. But for Game 5, the Cubs had their floodwall, right-hander Rick Sutcliffe, who was 16-1 for them that season.

The Padres rallied to beat him in Game 5 for the pennant.

So even though Verlander stands ready for Game 5, it behooves the Tigers to treat tonight's Game 4 with the same must-win status as the A's, for two reasons. First, if Verlander has to go in Game 5, he couldn't work until Game 3 of the championship series.

Second, in a winner-take-all Game 5, one extraordinary play could decide it -- such as a Coco Crisp gloving a would-be homer.

With the A's ahead 1-0, Prince Fielder led off the second with a bolt to deep right-center. Crisp, the centerfielder, raced to the right-center wall and, on the run, put his glove above it.

"He had a great jump, and he timed the jump perfectly for where he was at the wall, which is tough to do,"

Tigers outfielder Andy Dirks said. "This is his ballpark, so that helps. Your mind knows where the wall is.

When you go to a visiting park, you can look and practice in BP, but it's not quite as ingrained."

Crisp dropped Miguel Cabrera's fly ball for a two-run error in Game 2. "I have to make that dang play!!!" he tweeted.

He made this one. He snagged the ball and robbed Fielder of the tying homer.

The A's still led, 1-0. It was their fifth lead of the series. If Fielder's ball had gone out, the Tigers would have done what they had done with each of those other four A's leads: wiped it out in the half-inning after the A's took it.

"The Crisp catch was a key point in the game because it kept their momentum going," Brookens said. "We didn't tie it and get our feet on the ground a little bit. If he doesn't catch that ball, we might have quieted things down a little bit.

"The biggest challenge when a crowd is this loud -- and I'll speak from experience -- is slowing yourself down at the plate and getting into your routine. Sometimes it tends to get you cranked up and you get antsy and jumpy, maybe not as selective as you would be.

"We'll be more used to it (tonight). We have to come back, which I am sure we will."

The Tigers really haven't hit much in this series against the A's stunning young starters and deep bullpen.

(Anderson, the only non-rookie in the rotation, is 24.) The Tigers scored eight runs in the first two games, but only one came via an RBI hit: Alex Avila's homer. The others came on outs or gifts, including Crisp's drop.

On Tuesday night, the Tigers could be grateful the first two games of the series were in Detroit, even though the A's have the home-field advantage.

On Tuesday night, the Tigers got a taste of how the A's swept three games from Texas in front of raucous crowds in Oakland last week to overtake Texas for the A.L. West title.

As the A's came to bat in the first, the Coliseum sellout crowd was a roaring sea of green and gold. Tigers right-hander Anibal Sanchez found himself tossed about on its waves before he got an out.

Crisp led off with a single to right. Stephen Drew walked. Sanchez got the ground ball he needed for a double play from Yoenis Cespedes, but it was a smash right up the middle for an RBI single. Pitching coach Jeff Jones went to the mound with Sanchez seeking his first out.

Sanchez fled the inning with a strikeout and a double play. But the A's already had enough offense. Seth Smith doubled the lead with a homer off Sanchez in the fifth.

The A's have a trio of relievers bordering on dominant: right-hander Ryan Cook, who blanked the Tigers in the seventh; left-hander Sean Doolittle, who struck out the side in the eighth; and right-hander Grant Balfour, who gave up Miguel Cabrera's one-out single in the ninth, then retired Fielder -- representing the tying run -- on a game-ending double play. It would be inaccurate to say the crowd went wild. It stayed wild.

And a quarter-century after that playoff experience in the Metrodome, the Tigers have now found its loud Twin.

Tigers' Avisail Garcia even catching praise from Bob Melvin for big play

October 10, 2012

By John Lowe / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Avisail Garcia returned to the Tigers' lineup Tuesday night. He has become their intriguing rookie outfielder in these playoffs, just as Miguel Cabrera was for Florida in 2003.

Garcia played because a left-hander, Brett Anderson, started for Oakland. Garcia has started against left-handers since he arrived from the minors Aug. 31. He stepped into the role of right-handed-hitting outfielder that Ryan Raburn let slip away.

Garcia made a tremendous run-saving play in his first postseason game.

And Oakland manager Bob Melvin certainly noticed what Garcia did.

"How the game ended up, you go back and you look at some of the things that get lost in what happens at the end of games, and that was certainly a key play," Melvin said Tuesday before Game 3.

Garcia kept Oakland from expanding its 1-0 lead in Game 2 -- and perhaps having a big inning -- when he threw out the fleet Coco Crisp at the plate in the third inning. Tigers manager Jim Leyland now calls it perhaps the biggest play of the game.

"Coco is one of the better baserunners in the game, makes a great slide," Melvin said. "They had to make a perfect throw to get him and a great tag (by Gerald Laird) on top of it. You can see why they're excited about Garcia, he's got a chance to be an all-around player, offensively and defensively, as well. And he showed it on that play."

Garcia said that when he threw out Crisp, his mom, Iris, was screaming about it. She was watching the game at their home in Anaco, a city in northeastern Venezuela. Garcia, 21, lives there with his mom and older sister.

The rookie entered Tuesday looking for his first homer.

Countryman Cabrera hit a walk-off homer in his major league debut. He had been in the big leagues for three months when he played full-time for the Marlins in the 2003 postseason. The highlight was his first-inning opposite-field homer off the Yankees' Roger Clemens in Game 4 of the World Series.

Garcia's run-saving throw Sunday might not have gotten quite as much attention throughout Venezuela as it usually would.

"Sunday was the day of the presidential election," Garcia said.

But the beauty of Garcia's throw got him the kind of ovation that Hugo Chavez (elected to a fourth term in Venezuela) would have loved. The fans in the rightfield stands stood and waved their white towels to salute him.

"That was wild," Garcia said. "I've never seen something like that. I had goose bumps."

DARING DON:

Don Kelly didn't have any aftereffects from picking up Prince Fielder in Sunday's game-winning celebration. But Kelly doesn't plan to do it again soon.

"I told him the next time he's going to get me," Kelly said.

Kelly had other ninth-inning challenges to his health this season. He flew into the right-field stands in Seattle to make the game-ending catch of a foul ball. In Cleveland, he crashed the wall in an unsuccessful bid to catch a game-tying hit.

"I think the Cleveland one hurt the most," Kelly said.

MUM ON FUTURE: Leyland, unsigned beyond this season, again refused to discuss his future before Tuesday's game.

"I'm not talking about anything involving me," he said. "I haven't done that all year. Everybody has known that I want to manage. That's no secret. But we're not talking about me. I don't want any distractions. It doesn't mean anything to me or the players or anybody else right now."

REMEMBER WHEN? Entering Tuesday, the only time the Tigers swept a best-of-five series in the postseason came in the 1984 ALCS against Kansas City. (The following year, the championship series were expanded to the current best-of-seven.) In the clinching Game 3 at Tiger Stadium, the Tigers beat the Royals, 1-0.

Late in the contest, Ernie Harwell told his radio audience, "The night is cool, but the game is hot."

Tigers' Anibal Sanchez throws his pitches, delivers strong performance in Game 3 loss

October 10, 2012

By Shawn Windsor / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Anibal Sanchez had faced only two batters when Gerald Laird trotted out to the mound for a visit Tuesday night during Game 3 of the American League Division Series. Sanchez gave up a single to the A's leadoff hitter, Coco Crisp, had walked Stephen Drew, the crowd was roaring and Sanchez couldn't throw a strike.

"Throw your pitches," Laird told him, "throw your pitches."

The next batter, rookie leftfielder Yoenis Cespedes, singled home Crisp to give Oakland a 1-0 lead. That single brought Tigers pitching coach Jeff Jones out for a visit. After a quick confab with Jones and Laird, Sanchez finally settled down and began to throw strikes.

He punched out cleanup hitter Brandon Moss looking. Then he coaxed a double-play grounder from Josh Reddick.

"I had told him: 'You're one pitch from a double play,' " Laird said.

The catcher was right. Sanchez took a breath and escaped the first inning — it was his first playoff start.

"I was excited," he said later, "but I didn't feel nervous."

He said he threw well in the bullpen and well during his warm-up on the mound, throwing strikes. Then the game began and he couldn't find the zone, until he made the adjustment to the moment, to the noise, to the atmosphere.

"I've never pitched here," he said. "The A's have very good fans. You can't hear your teammates."

Laird thought his pitcher battled all evening — he gave up two runs on five hits in 6 1/3 innings. He said he didn't have quite the stuff that made him nearly unhittable his last couple starts but that he'd done enough for his team to win.

"We just didn't hit the ball," Laird said.

It's becoming a familiar story. The starter holds the other team down. The hitters can't take advantage.

Jim Leyland stresses to Tigers to keep even keel, relax

October 10, 2012

By Shawn Windsor / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Jim Leyland and Bob Melvin addressed the media Tuesday afternoon about a half-hour apart. One manager's team was on the brink of the next playoff round. The other manager's team faced elimination.

In body language and tone, however, you couldn't tell which manager had the lead and which one didn't. And that's the point -- in baseball one game has so little to do with the next.

Yes, hitters can get into a rhythm over the course of several games or even a few weeks, but the dynamics of each game are unique, and good managers understand this.

This is precisely why Leyland spent a portion of his pregame news conference talking about the difficulty of beating Oakland one more game.

"This team is ready to play," he said of the Athletics. "They're down two games to none, they're ready to play, their mind-set is good. That's the way you have to handle everything. There's no sense worrying about things you don't control."

It's cliché to say this, of course, but it's true, and it remains the hardest philosophy for managers to impress upon their players. Baseball requires quick, sudden bursts of movement and otherworldly hand-eye coordination, but it also requires an ability to relax.

"The better you can get that across to your players, I think the better everybody is," Leyland said. "For instance, I never worry about rain situations because the good Lord has it rain, it rains. The players say, 'How long is it going to rain?' I think I'm pretty good, but I have no friggin' idea how long it's going to rain. Are they going to pull the tarp at 8:30? I have no idea. Roll with every punch and don't get too excited as a manager. I think when you do, it rubs off on your players."

Leyland employed this strategy all season. Over and over he asked for patience, for the season to play out. He understood that immense pressure engulfed his squad the minute it broke camp, and that one of his most important responsibilities this season would be to manage the consequences of those expectations.

The ethos helped the Tigers ride out inconsistencies and overcome a late three-game deficit to the White Sox in September, when many figured the team was finished. And now Leyland was using the same approach with his team one game away from the American League Championship Series.

"We know this is not going to be easy to do," he said before Game 3. "It's going to be very loud, very difficult. We're playing a great team, one that has done a wonderful, wonderful job. But that's what we do for a living. We're here, we're supposed to be able to handle that kind of stuff."

Detroit has been handling stuff for several weeks. Remember that the 2-0 series lead was improbable not just for Don Kelly's walk-off sacrifice fly, but also because the Tigers had managed only one of their eight runs via an actual hit. The other runs were scored on errors (three runs), a double play (one run), a groundout (one run), a wild pitch (one run) and that sac fly.

"It's been a little freaky, to be honest with you," Leyland said. "It's pretty unique that you come in here and you're up, two games to none, when you've only actually scored one run by way of a hit. And we're going to have to do better than that if we want to close this thing out at some point. ... We're going to have to hit better. But it's baseball, and you never know how it's going to play out."

So don't worry.

And relax.

Athletics make life miserable for opponents at O.co Coliseum

October 10, 2012

By Shawn Windsor / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- This is what they do.

They take away home runs, as Coco Crisp did in the second inning when he sprinted to his left, leapt to the top of the wall near the 390-foot mark in center and pulled back a certain homer from Prince Fielder.

They hit home runs, as Seth Smith did in the fifth inning when he belted a moon shot to dead-center off Anibal Sanchez.

They dive to take away doubles, as leftfielder Yoenis Cespedes did in the seventh inning -- robbing Fielder of a hit. They turn double plays, they pump their fists, and they pitch. Brett Anderson, a gifted left-hander who missed most of the year recovering from Tommy John surgery, showed dominant form in six games down the stretch when he returned, strained his abdominal muscle at the end of the season and came back Tuesday night at O.co Coliseum to handcuff the Tigers.

Anderson, who is the veteran of the A's staff at just 24, struck out the first two batters of the game, Austin Jackson and Omar Infante, and got Miguel Cabrera to groundout to second base. It took about five minutes, which was more than enough time for the green-clad, yellow-towel waving crowd to fill the cavernous, concrete-lined, '70s era stadium with ear-splitting noise.

For the last two days several A's players -- along with A's manager Bob Melvin -- talked about the effect this crowd has on his team. It happened again Tuesday night as Oakland rode all that energy to a 2-0 victory over the Tigers and got back into the American League Division Series — Detroit leads, two games to one.

Melvin and his players spent so much time the past two days talking about the resiliency of this group that you figured if nothing else, they actually believed it. Clearly, the crowd did. And does, and will even more tonight during Game 4.

The throaty effort didn't go unnoticed by the Tigers.

Loudest crowd of the year? Anibal Sanchez was asked.

"Definitely," said the Tigers' starter, whose first-inning control problems exacerbated the noise.

He described it as fun, even if he could barely hear Gerald Laird when the catcher came out to the mound in the first to help calm him down.

"We knew this was going to be tough," Laird said.

It was enough to make you wonder what might have been had the Tigers been forced to begin the series in Oakland. Every strike by a Tiger elicited a roar — and cowbells and drums and horns — from the fans, most of whom spent most of the night on their feet. A Tigers out was reason to cheer even louder.

Just four months ago the Tigers played at Oakland in front of a crowds smaller than 10,000. That might as well have been a different season. Nearly 38,000 jammed the O.co Coliseum, turning the joint into one of the most uniquely hostile parks in baseball.

The Athletics eat it up — as they did when they overcame a five-game deficit to the Texas Rangers with nine games left in the season, as they did when they spotted those same Rangers a 5-1 lead in the final game of the season before dropping a 12-run bomb to flatten them and complete an improbable run to the West Division title.

That run stalled in Detroit last weekend. But this young and relentless team hit its stride again Tuesday on a clear night with a light breeze, riding the wave of a constant roar. They stole home runs. They hit home runs. They threw strikes.

And they won, shaking off a dispiriting loss two days earlier, the kind of gut-check they have exhibited the last couple of months.

Now it's the Tigers' turn to respond.

The din isn't going away anytime soon.

Tigers vs. A's: John Lowe scouts Game 4 pitching matchup

October 10, 2012

By John Lowe / Detroit Free Press

RH Max Scherzer

Key stats: 16-7, 3.74 ERA.

Quality starts: 20-for-32.

The buzz: In mid-September, Scherzer was about as hot as any pitcher in baseball. He had broken through to the elite level the Tigers felt he could have reached since they obtained him three years ago. He was 10-1 in his last 14 starts. He struck out at least eight in 10 straight starts -- the longest such streak in the majors since 2009, when San Francisco's Tim Lincecum also had 10 straight games of at least eight strikeouts. Scherzer was competing with Justin Verlander for the major league lead in strikeouts. Then the remainder of Scherzer's season was dampened by shoulder weakness. He pitched four shutout innings in a meaningless regular-season finale, and he said this week that he was ready to go in this game.

Key hitter for Scherzer: Josh Reddick. The A's power-hitting rightfielder is 3-for-5 lifetime off Scherzer.

RH A.J. Griffin

Key stats: 7-1, 3.06 ERA.

Quality starts: 9-for-15.

The buzz: Griffin, 24, made his major league debut in late June, shortly before the A's started to become baseball's hottest second-half team. He went 6-0 in his first 11 starts and finished 7-1. Here's a take on him from former major league pitcher Mark Gubicza, now the Angels' TV analyst: "Griffin pitches extremely well inside. He's got a lot of guts. He has an incredibly good change-up." And there's one more thing, the kind of thing that can make a difference, especially in a playoff game. "He fields extremely well and holds runners on," Gubicza said.

Key hitter for Griffin: Miguel Cabrera. That's the answer for a lot of pitchers, but Cabrera is 2-for-2 off Griffin with a home run, double and sacrifice fly.

Tigers' Jim Leyland praises Cardinals rookie manager Mike Matheny

October 10, 2012

By John Lowe / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- University of Michigan product Mike Matheny, who had never coached or managed in pro baseball before this season, has taken the St. Louis Cardinals to the playoffs in his first year as manager. Some might be surprised by that.

Tigers manager Jim Leyland is not.

Leyland got to know Matheny during Leyland's hiatus from managing. In those years, Leyland scouted for the Cardinals and was part of their spring-training instructional staff. Matheny was the starting catcher in 2000-04. "I was around him a lot, and I spent some time with him," Leyland said. "We had some great conversations. I have the utmost respect for him. He's a class guy. He kind of got thrown in the fire -- he and Robin Ventura both -- and certainly survived that. Both did a great job."

Ventura, like Matheny, had never managed or coached in pro ball when he received a major league managing job this season. Ventura's White Sox led the Tigers for most of the second half in the American League Central. Leyland, 67, and Matheny, 42, exchanged text messages last week after each of their teams made the playoffs. Baseball's senior manager and baseball's most prominent new manager conquered an oft-challenging regular season.

Matheny was in the hot seat from the outset because he replaced the legendary Tony La Russa and took over the defending world champions minus Albert Pujols. Matheny's steadiness was one of the most impressive feats of the season.

This afternoon, Matheny steps into his hottest cauldron yet: managing the visiting team in Washington's first home postseason game in 79 years. The last man to manage the visiting team in a Washington postseason game was player-manager Bill Terry of the 1933 New York Giants. Terry remains the last man to hit .400 in the National League -- he did so in 1930. If there's such a thing as a rookie manager doing the equivalent of hitting .400, that's what Matheny is doing now.

Ticker: Tigers were robbed -- well, at least Prince Fielder was -- twice

October 10, 2012

By Steve Schrader / Detroit Free Press

So who do we blame for the Tigers' lack of offense in Tuesday night's 2-0 loss? It has to be somebody's fault, right?

Prince Fielder for not hitting the ball, oh, 6 inches higher in the second inning?

Or A's outfielder Coco Crisp for leaping like some comic book hero and snagging Fielder's drive before it went over the wall?

Fielder for not hitting the ball, oh, 6 inches lower in the seventh inning?

Or outfielder Yoenis Cespedes for diving and snagging that Fielder drive before it hit the turf?

One of those nights, eh, Prince? And it wasn't the first for him.

ESPN said Fielder is the only player to be robbed of three homers like Crisp's catch this season -- Johnny Damon did it to him June 6 and Mike Trout on Sept. 8.

Outtakes

- Kind of a boring game, wasn't it? And, sorry, but the TBS announcing team of Don Orsillo and Buck Martinez didn't do much to help.

- The Giants-Reds ran over on TBS, so the Tigers game started on TNT, pre-empting regular programming. But who needs "The Mentalist" when you have Jim Leyland?

- TBS also is the home of Team Coco -- as in Conan O'Brien, not Crisp, but was that some kind of bad omen?

- Leyland's buddy Tony La Russa -- the one-time A's manager who lives in the area -- was at the game.

- A's effective starter Brett Anderson, coming back from an oblique strain, was seen pleading his case to stay in the game, but he got Strasburged after six.

Campy pitches, too

Former A's shortstop Bert Campaneris threw out the first pitch Tuesday night.

Remember him from the 1972 ALCS, when he took exception to the Tigers' Lerrin LaGrow hitting him on the ankle with a pitch and threw his bat at him?

After the bench-clearing dust settled, Campy was suspended for the series.

But, really, he threw his bat at a guy! These days, everybody gets all upset if somebody kisses a baseball.

A's: The tarp stays

The A's say tarps covering some 15,000 seats will remain for the rest of the ALCS -- if necessary -- despite a fan petition with more than 10,000 signatures asking they be removed, the Oakland Tribune reports.

But if the A's advance, they said they may consider the cumbersome task of removing the tarps.

Quick hits

- A gray-haired gentleman delayed the start of the Giants-Reds game in the battleground state of Ohio when he ran on the field with a Romney sign and was tackled by cops. Hey, since when can't you bring a Mitt to the ballgame?

- Headline at sportspickle.com: "Marlins still confident the Miguel Cabrera-Cameron Maybin/Burke Badenhop trade will pan out."

- The Tigers and Reds were listed as 11/4 co-favorites to win the World Series by bovada.lv. Of course that was before Tuesday's losses, so the odds probably got a little longer for both.

- Asked which Bay Area team had a better chance of coming back from an 0-2 deficit, Oakland or San Francisco, ESPN.com pundits Eric Karabell, Jason Wojciechowski and Matt Meyers all went with the A's, mostly because they were coming home, where they are especially tough.

- No kissing the broom Tuesday night, eh?

Oakland A's: The comeback kids of the (AL) West

October 10, 2012

By Shawn Windsor / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- The Oakland Athletics, regardless how they played in this series against the Tigers, should go down as one of the great stories of the season.

"Unbelievable," Tigers manager Jim Leyland said Tuesday before the start of Game 3 of the American League Division Series.

Consider: The A's were five games back of Texas with nine games left. They won eight of those nine, including the last six.

On the final series of the year the A's hosted the Rangers and swept them to win the West Division by a game. It was the only time Oakland led the division outright the entire year. They won 18 of 26 to finish the season and went 51-25 the second half of the year, easily the best in baseball.

Before returning home for its final two series, Oakland embarked on a brutal, three-city trip to Detroit, New York and Texas in late September. They lost two of three to the Tigers and the first two games to the Yankees, the second loss in particular was deflating -- a 10-9, 14-inning affair. The A's came back the next day to beat New York, 5-4, to avoid the sweep and grab a little momentum on the way to passing Texas.

After losing twice in Detroit in the ALDS over the weekend, the A's returned home intending to find ways to win more pressure games.

"Yeah, we've played a lot of games when we lost tough games and we've come back and won the next day," manager Bob Melvin said before Game 3. "We do have some history with that."

The team had 14 walk-off victories, which suggests this group was expert at grinding out games, looking no further than the next inning.

Melvin hoped that approach would help them Tuesday night.

"If you look at it, you have to win all three of these games, that's probably not the right way to look at it," he said. "We're going to go out and try to win today's game and go on and deal with tomorrow, tomorrow. It's much less daunting to think about that than saying, 'All right, we have to win three games and we have (Justin) Verlander on the last day.'"

Oakland 2, Detroit Tigers 0: Brett Anderson, bullpen extend ALDS

October 10, 2012

By Kirkland Crawford / Detroit Free Press

The Tigers offense could only muster four hits as they fell to the Athletics, 2-0, tonight in Game 3 of the American League Division Series in Oakland, Calif.

With Detroit still holding a 2-1 series lead, Game 4 is Wednesday night at 9:30 p.m. Eastern time on TNT. Max Scherzer is Detroit's scheduled starter and the A's will start A.J. Griffin on the mound.

Brett Anderson, who didn't join the team until August after recovering from elbow surgery, blanked the Tigers for six innings, giving up just two hits and two walks while striking out six.

Anibal Sanchez was nearly as good over 6 1/3 innings, allowing two earned runs on four hits and two walks on 101 pitches. He struck out three.

After the Tigers went 1-2-3 in the first inning, Coco Crisp opened the bottom of the inning with a single to right. Stephen Drew then walked and Yoenis Cespedes singled up the middle to drive in the game's first run.

After Brandon Moss struck out and Josh Reddick grounded into an inning-ending double play.

To open the second inning, Prince Fielder hit one which seemed destined to go over the wall in center, but Coco Crisp made a leaping catch to keep Detroit scoreless. From there, Delmon Young and Jhonny Peralta hit back-to-back singles, but Andy Dirks grounded into a fielder's choice and Avisail Garcia grounded out to the pitcher. But from there, Anderson stayed in control, yielding just a pair of walks from the second to the sixth innings, striking out Omar Infante and Miguel Cabrera to end the sixth.

Oakland went to the bullpen in the seventh, sending Ryan Cook to the mound. Fielder sent a sinking line drive to left which was gloved by Cespedes on a dive for the first out. Peralta got a broken-bat, two-out single up the middle but Dirks got jammed and flied out to left.

Sean Doolittle pitched the eighth for Oakland and struck out Garcia, Gerald Laird and Austin Jackson.

Grant Balfour came on to get the save in the ninth. He struck out Infante but Cabrera hit a single to right.

However, Fielder hit a grounder up the middle which Drew fielded, stepped on second and threw to first to complete the game-ending double play.

After yielding a run in the first, Sanchez allowed just a single in the second, third and fourth innings. But with one out in the fifth, Seth Smith hit a solo home run to center to double Oakland's lead.

In the bottom of the inning, Sanchez was pulled after a one-out single by Josh Donaldson. Octavio Dotel entered the game and got Smith to foul out to third. Derek Norris then struck out. Phil Coke quickly got the first two outs of the eighth before giving up a walk to Drew. Usual starter Rick Porcello came on for his first relief appearance since last year's ALCS. He threw one pitch to Cespedes, who popped out to second.

Tigers tied with Reds for best odds to win 2012 World Series

October 10, 2012

By Brian Manzullo / Detroit Free Press

Odds makers seem to favor the Detroit Tigers right now.

As of today, the Tigers have 11-to-4 odds to win the 2012 World Series, tied with the Cincinnati Reds for the best odds in baseball, at least according to Bovada's sports books.

The New York Yankees have 4-to-1 odds, the Baltimore Orioles 12-to-1 and the Oakland Athletics 25-to-1.

The Tigers and Red are the lone two teams entering Game 3 action with 2-0 leads in their respective division series (which are probably helping their odds right now).

As far as the American League goes, the Tigers sit at 6-to-5 odds to win the pennant, while the Yankees are at 7-to-5, the Orioles 6-to-1 and the Athletics 12-to-1.

Other interesting things to note:

- ESPN's AccuScore says the A's have a 54 percent chance of winning Game 3.
- In "Streak for the Cash," ESPN's pick 'em contest, 65 percent of players are voting for the A's to beat the Tigers tonight.

More notes

- In case you missed it, ESPN just posted its E:60 feature on Tigers ace Justin Verlander. It's a great glimpse at his upbringing as a kid who just could never sit still.
- If necessary, Thursday's Game 5 at Oakland will start at 9:37 p.m. on TNT.

Tigers fans wise not to push the panic button after Game 3 setback

October 10, 2012

By Lynn Henning / The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif. — Props to the Tigers fan base after Tuesday night's playoff game at Oakland Coliseum. They know a baseball gem when they see one. The Tigers audience was rated MA — for mature — in spreading its postgame thoughts through the social-media world after the Athletics had punched out Detroit, 2-0, in Game 3 of a division playoff series the Tigers could have clinched with a Tuesday victory.

Eddie Bajek, a Florida engineer and well-known Detroit baseball pundit, said via Twitter: "Easily the least depressed I've been after a Tigers postseason loss."

Another of the Tigers galaxy's Twitter regulars, who writes under the TigersProspectReport flag, had a crisp account of just where manager Jim Leyland's team stands heading into tonight's Game 4:

"Everyone needs to calm down. They (Athletics) have to win vs. Scherzer AND Verlander. If they do that, then they deserve to win."

Spot-on assessments, all.

A's still the underdogs

With the latest virtuoso playing out on a cool October night along San Francisco Bay, the Tigers and Athletics combined for their third consecutive All-Star-grade pitching performance.

That would be one way to look at it. And it's a reasonable view, even if a handful of Tigers bats have joined the Witness Protection Program.

These have been the best three-game displays of pitching the Tigers and an opponent have put together in 2012. The first two playoff showdowns in Detroit were tightly pitched, if not exactly masterpieces of defense.

Tuesday night's game was an art gallery loaded with good pitching as well as spectacular defense, with the leaping, diving, ball-snagging Athletics making up for their weekend gaffes in Detroit.

The show could be extended. Max Scherzer, feeling strong after his deltoid strain, is Detroit's pitching choice tonight. Justin Verlander, armed with his Cy Young Award, is available for Thursday's deciding Game 5, should the Athletics and their sonic-boom rooters triumph again tonight.

But as the TigersProspectReport scribe said, putting Detroit's situation in neat perspective: "If they do that (Athletics beat the Tigers' pitching masters), then they deserve to win."

Precisely.

The Tigers are worried just enough to know that tonight's the night to put this series away. They will work against a right-hander, A.J. Griffin, who has been getting conked in his more recent starts, one of which was a mugging by the Tigers.

If they get a typical 2012 work shift from Scherzer, and if their bullpen behaves, the Tigers doubtless believe they can do enough damage against Griffin to get the clincher and get out of town, headed for the American League Championship Series.

The more ominous argument is that it doesn't always take a Hall of Fame pitching effort to throttle manager Jim Leyland's team. Some have also noticed that if the Tigers don't get runs early and during the mid-innings, buzzards begin circling as an opponent's bullpen torturers finish them off.

All too true.

Sometimes, you credit the pitching

It is a mystifying team, the 2012 Tigers. They have all that thunder and lightning in the middle of their order with Miguel Cabrera and Prince Fielder. They often have Austin Jackson helping out, or Andy Dirks, or someone who decides Cabrera and Fielder have been asked to do enough this season and who donates some semblance of a big hit.

But on so many nights, what the fans hear from Leyland and from his players is that old refrain:

"You've got to tip your hat to the pitcher."

Sometimes, yes. Tuesday night, absolutely. Jackson was asked afterward about Brett Anderson, the Athletics starter who might as well have hung a Sign of The Beefcarver sign on the pitching mound. He turned the Tigers into tenderloin with his mendacious, slashing curveballs.

Jackson, initially, didn't answer. He didn't need to.

He bulged his eyes in did-you-see-that fashion, eked out a laugh that was more of a snort, and said, with a shake of his head:

"Nasty."

Not a bad word to use for a tough playoff series: nasty. It speaks of cruelty. And cruel is what the Tigers will view this playoff series and year as having been if they don't knock out the Athletics in one of these next two games.

All eyes now turn to Tigers' Game 4 starter Max Scherzer

October 10, 2012

By Tom Gage / The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif. — It can be strange to be a Game 4 starter, as the Tigers' Max Scherzer just found out. He loves to pitch. He loves to start, but for the first time in his career he was hoping not to.

That's what happens, though, when your team is up two games to none in a best-of-five series and you're watching Game 3 — pulling for a sweep.

Scherzer is fully recovered from his shoulder and ankle problems. He's ready to pitch and anticipates doing well.

But like all the other Tigers, he'd rather be back in Detroit tonight looking ahead to the American League Championship Series.

"I was the biggest cheerleader today, hoping we would win," he said. "It is a little bit weird not wanting to pitch, but at the end of the day, the team comes first, and we wanted to win today.

"But we weren't able to come through, so now it's my turn to give the team a chance to win."

Enough already

His future continues to be speculated about — and Jim Leyland continues not to take questions about it.

He's been consistent in that.

But it's gone to the next step now.

Not only is he not talking about it, but he's tired of saying he's not talking about it — so much so that he doesn't want to read any more stories about it.

He can't control that, though. His future has been a frequent topic of online and in-print discussion.

Does he want to come back as the Tigers' manager? That's been the latest question.

Two major baseball websites have run stories on the subject this week, saying that he does. So in a pre-game session with Leyland on Tuesday, he was asked if those stories were correct.

"I don't want to talk about me," Leyland said. "I haven't all year. Everybody's known I want to manage. It's no secret. But I'm not talking about me. I don't want any distractions."

It's not been a distraction, though.

Leyland might not like it — and it's understandable that he doesn't want it to discuss it.

But questions about a manager, any manager, in the post-season without a signed extension are only natural.

Only one pitcher

Wishful thinking, that's all it was.

The A's sent A.J. Griffin, their projected Game 4 starter, to the interview room before Game 3, but the Tigers did not send Scherzer, his scheduled counterpart.

That's because one team was hoping there would be a Game 4 — and the other was hoping there wouldn't.

Simple as that.

But it explains why Scherzer was the last player brought to the interview room after the game.

How special?

"I'm not going to say there's anything special about him just yet," Leyland said when asked on Tuesday what's "so special" about rookie outfielder Avisail Garcia. "He's only played a few games in the big leagues. He's probably not really ready for this, if you want to know the truth."

Garcia went hitless in the Tigers' 2-0 loss in Game 3 and now is 0-for-6 in the series.

"But why not (play him)?" Leyland said before the game. "He's got talent. This is asking a lot about him, though. But I will tell you this. He will not be here and you'll never hear of him again. He's going to be here for a long time.

"It's just he's probably not quite ready for this, to be honest with you."

Around the horn

How did Leyland relax before heading the ballpark?

"Went out for a walk, did a little shopping and bought a sweater," he said. "That's what I do on the road. I like to walk around if there are nice stores.

"They're a little expensive here, but my wife said I could buy something if I wanted to."

... Leyland said he also ran into a few Tigers' fans, but the small-world part of his stay in California so far was that he got in a cab after having dinner on Monday night and the driver was "from five minutes away from where I live in Pittsburgh. I told him I might be driving one with him next year."

... Yankees or Orioles next? To this extent, Leyland and his coaches are paying attention to that series. Not only did they watch the game before going out to dinner with their wives on the off day, but they had it on Gene Lamont's phone during dinner.

A's manager Bob Melvin: We'll pitch to Miguel Cabrera, Prince Fielder

October 10, 2012

By Lynn Henning / The Detroit News

Oakland — What the Athletics were saying about the Tigers, and themselves, ahead of Tuesday's Game 3 of their Division Series at Oakland Coliseum:

Avoid them?

Bob Melvin, the Athletics manager, was asked about those kings of clubs in the Tigers batting order: Miguel Cabrera and Prince Fielder.

Might there be any merit to just pitching around a pair of hitters who together do most of the damage in the Tigers' batting order?

"We'll take a look," said Melvin, the one-time Tigers catcher and coach. "For me, it's difficult to pitch around both.

"But it's not an easy task. You look at the numbers and they both have knocked in over 100 runs and both of them hit 30-plus homers, so somebody is pitching to them."

Griffin agrees

A.J. Griffin, who was on schedule to pitch today's Game 4, was on board with his manager when it came to boycotting Cabrera-Fielder.

"That's a good question," said Griffin, a left-hander, "but you want to be competitive every time you go out there.

"You want to pitch smart to them, obviously. But I don't think just putting them on base is a very competitive attitude. Just be careful. Just go after them and try to get them out at the same time."

No breather

Melvin reminded his audience that the Tigers batting order consisted of nine names.

"It's not like those are the only two guys in the lineup that hit the ball," he said, when a bit too much conversation focused on Cabrera-Fielder. "They have a pretty good lineup.

"They have one of the better offensive teams and we have one of the better pitching staffs."

Melvin might have been overlooking a few people in the batting order's southern hemisphere, but during a playoff series, managerial diplomacy tends to reign.

Scherzer memories

Melvin worked with Tigers starter Max Scherzer when both were with the Diamondbacks in 2008-09, and he's glad he was wearing a mask.

"I remember the first time I actually played catch with him," Melvin said. "The ball gets on you a lot quicker than it appears because of the extension that he creates.

"He gets out there a little bit farther than most guys do. I think the only question in Arizona was: Is he going to be a closer-type or a starter? And he probably could have been either.

"He's developed into quite a starter. I know they're happy to have him. He's a tough competitor on top of it."

Sunday's gem

The Throw.

It wasn't quite there with Willie Horton's home-plate peg that nailed Lou Brock in the 1968 World Series. But Tigers rookie Avisail Garcia's one-bounce throw that nailed Coco Crisp at the plate during Sunday's 5-4 victory was, for Melvin, a not-so-happy reminder what a right-fielder with a power arm can do to upset a big inning.

"How the game ended up, you go back and you look at some of the things that get lost, and that was certainly a key play," Melvin said. "Coco is one of the better baserunners in the game, made a great slide. They had to make a perfect throw to get him and a great tag (by Gerald Laird) on top of it.

"You can see why they're excited about Garcia," Melvin said of the 21-year-old right-fielder who joined the Tigers on Aug. 31. "He's got a chance to be an all-around player, offensive and defensively.

"And he showed it on that play."

Tigers starter Anibal Sanchez's price tag goes up after outing

October 10, 2012

By Lynn Henning / The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif. — Take a bow, Anibal Sanchez. You were Tuesday night's second star in a pearl of a playoff game at Oakland Coliseum.

And about that free-agent sales tag you'll soon be advertising to big-league clubs, most of which need a solid starting pitcher in 2013.

No discounts, folks. Anyone who hopes to recruit the Tigers right-hander, after the month of starts he has strung together, will be paying premium shekels for a 28-year-old pitcher who had another display of pitching prowess Tuesday during the Athletics' 2-0 victory over the Tigers in Game 3 of their Division Series.

Sanchez performed like a man who should have won: 61/3 innings, five hits, two runs, one courtesy of a low, down-the-gut fastball that Seth Smith sent soaring 410 feet beyond the center-field fence.

Sanchez's problem was familiar to Tigers followers. His partners did too little with those bats.

And that wasn't entirely the hitters' fault in a game in which the Tigers and Sanchez were thoroughly and artistically beaten. A's fielders made so many acrobatic plays it looked as if Cirque du Soleil had invaded Oakland Coliseum.

But back to Sanchez, who first pulled on a Tigers uniform in July after he had been shipped to Detroit in a trade with the Marlins.

He had a bruising start Tuesday, allowing a pair of singles and a walk to his first three batters, good for an instant A's run.

But after that first-inning revolt, Sanchez kept the A's in custody, apart from Smith's home run and two more singles.

The Tigers would like to sign Sanchez for 2013. They could use a right-hander of his steadiness and style, a pitcher who Tuesday night made it eight quality starts (six innings or more having allowed three or fewer earned runs) in his last nine games since joining the Tigers.

He has a 2.23 ERA during that stretch. Coupled with the 3.94 ERA he put together during a 19-start mission for the Marlins in 2012, he should become powerfully alluring and no less than a No. 2 starter for any number of rotations in either league.

The Tigers understand what happens when authentically good pitchers hit the free-agent auction.

They tend to get more dollars and more contract years than even generous estimates project before all the competing and bidding hits full fervor.

And so the Tigers probably will find themselves priced out of a free-agent frenzy that could and should make Sanchez an extremely comfortable man by the time he and his representatives (SFX) have shaken hands and popped champagne corks.

The Tigers, though, will have no regrets should Sanchez end up in another town, even if it means they someday will confront his bag-full of fastballs, sliders, cutters, change-ups, etc.

They have gotten precisely what they needed when July's trade was wrapped and ribboned: a starting pitcher who purged the Tigers of any anxiety they had about their back-end pitching rotation, which at the time was in flux due to Drew Smyly's strained oblique.

The season is not yet finished. Sanchez will get another start or more if the Tigers can find a way to finish the Athletics in either Game 4 or Game 5.

But they are in the playoffs, in part because a soon-to-be-wealthy right-handed pitcher has been just the craftsman they sought in nailing down July's high-profile trade with the Marlins.

Tigers still have advantage, but bats' blackout must end

October 10, 2012

By Bob Wojnowski / The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif. — It's the nagging flaw the Tigers just can't shake. For all their gains the past few weeks, they're still prone to bouts of flailing.

Oakland's yellow towels were waving Tuesday night and the Tigers waved along with them. A's lefty Brett Anderson dominated in a 2-0 victory that nudged the Tigers closer to real danger. Detroit hitters struck out 11 times, waving and wavering, especially in the late innings.

This was the script the Tigers were wary of, and have been wary for a while. Tough place to play. Tough opposing pitcher. Loud crowd and quiet bats. Shhhh, but there's a series brewing here, as we suspected.

The A's are too pesky to be swept. The Tigers have been too inconsistent to sweep. It's not necessarily a fatal flaw — they lead the series 2-1, and with Max Scherzer on the mound tonight, you still like their chances. But the way the A's pitched and played defense, the Tigers' tight offense isn't loosening up. Prince Fielder must have gone to bed muttering after losing a home run on one great catch, and at least a single on another.

The Tigers declined to lament, opting to acknowledge the A's terrific performance. Manager Jim Leyland said Oakland "played a perfect game," and he was about right. The crowd was electric, which was expected.

Anderson was electric, too, which wasn't totally expected. He hadn't pitched in three weeks because of a muscle pull, but the Tigers couldn't do anything, finishing with four hits.

"We knew what we were coming into, we knew they were a great team, the No. 2 seed," catcher Gerald Laird said. "This kind of environment is fun, and we knew they weren't going to roll over. We know we can hit, and if we can just scrape up some runs, with our pitching staff, that could be enough."

I suppose it could be enough if Scherzer — or Justin Verlander in a possible Game 5 — completely stymies the A's. But Oakland is 51-31 at home mainly because of its pitching, and through three games, runs are scarce.

Miguel Cabrera and Fielder are without an RBI yet, although they've hit the ball hard.

'Credit their pitching'

This felt like one of those classic hockey playoff games from the West Coast, where the Red Wings make an opposing goalie look even better than he is. The Tigers collected two singles in the second inning and then not another hit until the seventh, and by then it was 2-0 and too late to pull the goalie. (Stretched the hockey metaphor too far?)

It's too bad because Tigers starter Anibal Sanchez was good enough to win. Now suddenly, the A's must believe a three-game rally is possible, as it was when they swept the Rangers to complete a miraculous run to the division title and become one of baseball's stirring stories.

The Tigers had a chance to stop the stir and couldn't do it. The opponent Tuesday night was the A's, but for the Tigers, it was a series of Q-and-A's. For instance: Could they end this thing before it got real tense?

And: Could they keep winning without prolific hitting?

Fair question. Leyland was posing it himself before the game, noting that of the Tigers' eight runs in the series, only one — an Alex Avila home run — came on a hit. It might be a minor distinction, but against Oakland's top-notch pitching, it's relevant.

"We just didn't do much offensively, and you credit their pitching," Leyland said. "Their bullpen is really nasty. And their starter gave them what they needed."

'That's why they're here'

For the Tigers, it usually circles back to the hitting. Their pitching is very good, and they're even playing crisp defense right now. That's different than what Oakland did, playing Crisp defense. In the second inning, Fielder hit a drive up the gap and centerfielder Coco Crisp chased, leaped and swiped it just inches above the wall.

That seemed to ignite the A's and their fans. Sanchez said it was the loudest crowd he'd heard all season. Fielder had reason to shake his head, but like most of the Tigers, wasn't doing it.

"You can't do nothing about it," he said. "That's why they're here, they make those plays from time to time. It happens."

In Game 2, Crisp had dropped a two-out fly ball that allowed two runs to score. But back in their unique ballpark, the A's looked considerably more comfortable.

The Tigers rarely have looked comfortable on the road this season, with a 38-44 mark. They're going to have to win one here somehow, and the next shot goes to Scherzer, who hasn't pitched in seven days. Pitching is rarely the problem for the Tigers, although Sanchez had a problem initially. The first three Oakland hitters reached base, and just like that, it was 1-0.

Sanchez settled down but the Tigers couldn't crank it up, not against Anderson. He's only 24 but supremely talented, one of those fuzzy, scruffy Oakland stories. He missed most of the season after elbow surgery, starting only six times, then pulled an oblique muscle Sept. 19 against the Tigers and didn't return until Tuesday night. Here he was, moving them down, allowing only two hits and striking out six in six innings. Another 24-year-old A's pitcher, rookie A.J. Griffin, will start tonight, and the Tigers should have a significant advantage with Scherzer. But you wonder if the A's are just too young to be intimidated.

There were no theatrics or dramatics in this one, just Oakland pitchers flinging and Detroit hitters swinging. The A's spent the first two games striking out and the Tigers struck back, so to speak. Their offense needs to make a lot more noise quickly, before it really gets loud out here.

Tigers fail to clinch; defense, pitching keep A's hopes alive

October 10, 2012

By Tom Gage / The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif. — Their bags weren't packed, if that's what you are wondering.

The Tigers didn't jinx themselves.

Had they won, and completed a three-game sweep of the Oakland Athletics, they would have flown home Wednesday, not right after celebrating.

But that's a moot point now, isn't it — considering the Tigers lost 2-0 in Game 3 on Tuesday night, but still can win their American League Division Series with one more victory.

From the looks of how difficult it's been for both teams to score runs so far, however, it's going to take more than offense to win another game.

Just as it required more than offense for the A's to stay alive.

It took excellent pitching, spectacular defense — great catches by Coco Crisp in center and Yoenis Cespedes in left — along with the help of something the Tigers haven't often encountered at the Oakland Coliseum.

Noise.

"There's usually not that many fans here," said Max Scherzer, who will start Game 4 for the Tigers. "That was the most rowdy atmosphere I've ever seen here."

There's something eerie, though, about the way the A's bounce back at home — how they did it at season's end against Texas, and now.

"We have some history with that," manager Bob Melvin said.

The A's pitched well. But even the fact they blanked the Tigers was overshadowed by their defense.

Specifically, the plays by Crisp and Cespedes.

They were entirely different, the two catches. One was a leap, the other a dive.

One robbed Prince Fielder of a home run in the second, the other took at least a single away from him to start the seventh.

"They pitched and played a perfect game," said Tigers manager Jim Leyland, "and Coco gave them a lot of momentum when he took the home run away."

Crisp didn't initially seem to have a chance when Fielder crushed his long drive to center. But he had a two-run blunder in Game 2 to make up for, and if it took him pole-vaulting over the fence to haul down the ball, he appeared determined to do it.

The only part of him that had to go up and over, though, was his glove, but the catch he made was stupendous.

"The key to that was that they played deep," Leyland said. "Had he been playing a normal center field or just a couple of steps back, he probably wouldn't have gotten there."

"It was a great catch, no question about it. But the outfield plays deep. He plays deep."

It didn't appear demoralizing to the Tigers, though, because they put together a scoring chance immediately after the catch. But the trouble they were caused was manageable for the A's because of how the inning began.

Cespedes also had to close quickly on the ball to make his catch. But it was in front of him instead of behind him — and it was the type of play on which an outfielder can easily land on, and damage, a shoulder.

He executed it perfectly, though.

Just as the A's executed their approach of one game at a time perfectly.

"Thinking you have to win all three games is probably not the right way to look at it," Melvin said. "It's much less daunting to try to win today's game and deal with tomorrow's tomorrow, than to say, 'We have to win three games and we have to face (Justin) Verlander on the last day.'"

In any case, the ways the A's prevented runs, or situations that could have led to runs, will be replayed as highlights more often than the ways they scored their runs in the first and the fifth.

Cespedes singled in the first run. Seth Smith's long home run to center made it a two-run lead.

With an extension ladder, Jackson might have been able to replicate Crisp's catch in center, but none was handy.

As for the pitching, both starters were effective — the A's Brett Anderson more so than the Tigers' Anibal Sanchez, though.

Sanchez allowed two runs on five hits in 6.1 innings. Anderson, bouncing back from short absence (oblique) after a long absence (elbow), blanked the Tigers on two hits in six innings.

The A's bullpen finished the job with three shutout innings, striking out five.

The Tigers' scoring chances were fewer than few and far between. Other than Fielder's home run that wasn't, they had one.

In fact, they got a runner past first base just once.

They had runners at first and second with one out, then at first and third with two, in the second. But Avisail Garcia's tapper back to the mound ended the inning.

"Coco set the tone," Anderson said.

And when it was over, the Tigers quietly returned to their hotel — which they would have done anyway.

Manager Jim Leyland stands firm behind those who got the Tigers this far

October 10, 2012

By Lynn Henning / The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif. - Break up that old gang the Tigers have built and won with in 2012, and you're all but saying a team good enough to make the playoffs isn't good enough to win them.

But as their divisional series with the Athletics was set to re-ignite Tuesday at Oakland Coliseum, the Tigers might wonder about changing certain roles and their hourly shifts as the Tigers tried to finish off the Athletics and win a ticket to the American League Championship Series.

Delmon Young entered Tuesday with some serious, month-long under-production at the vital No. 5 spot in manager Jim Leyland's order. Jhonny Peralta has had offensive and defensive issues at shortstop. And not everyone believes set-up man Joaquin Benoit should be an automatic choice to pitch to every batter in eighth-inning situations, particularly if there are left-handed batters stacked against him.

But those who say it's foolish to shake up a winning team during a postseason in which the Tigers had won their first two playoff games can rest their case: A baseball team, they argue shouldn't mess with success.

Leyland, who is loyal to a fault to those players who have been Tigers mainstays, made that very point Sunday when asked about putting Benoit, who had allowed two runs, including a home run, which put the Athletics on top, 4-3, in a game the Tigers won, 5-4.

"We're not going to change anything now," Leyland said when asked if Benoit was the necessary choice against Athletics left-handed sluggers Brandon Moss and Josh Reddick, with Reddick's home run off Benoit providing that 4-3 lead.

"It is what it is. If Benoit is fresh and we have the lead in the eighth, he's going to be there."

Benoit's body of work

Leyland has two seasons of generally reliable service by Benoit as his Exhibit A evidence. And yet Benoit, who turned 35 in July, has allowed 15 home runs this season. Two of those homers came in the eighth inning of a 4-3 loss to the Yankees on Aug. 9 when Benoit was tagged for back-to-back blasts by switch-hitter Mark Teixeira and left-handed batting Eric Chavez.

Benoit was staring down a gun-barrel that afternoon in Detroit, just as he was Sunday with Moss and Reddick on the menu.

Leyland, though, has heavy numbers on his side. Benoit has pitched in 75 games this season. And in the vast majority of those innings, he has been gold. His change-up is considered to be so tough on left-handers that it somewhat neutralizes the left-right percentages.

But it could also be argued that a left-hander should at least be considered when consecutive left-handed power hitters are digging in for a matchup the hitters believe favors them.

Young's situation is also ticklish, mostly because the Tigers don't have an easy choice at the No. 5 spot in Leyland's order.

But his five extra-base hits and five ground-ball double plays in the past five weeks have put enormous stress on a run-producing slot in the lineup. During these waning weeks, Young has been as likely to hit into a double play as to get an extra-base hit, and that ratio could eventually spell trouble for the Tigers if their playoff run pushes on.

Against right-handers, it could be argued Alex Avila would be a better pick, even as Avila wraps up a tepid 2012 season. Andy Dirks, another possibility, typically bats second against left-handers and probably benefits his team more as that move-'em-along second hitter who can also hit the long ball.

Right-handed options? Gerald Laird fares better as a back-of-the-order hitter. Omar Infante tends to be a No. 2 or back-end choice, as his hitting style demands. Rookie right-fielder Avisail Garcia might be a terrific No. 5 choice - a year from now. But with so few weeks and games of big-league life on his resume, Leyland won't use Garcia at No. 5.

Nor is Peralta any answer at the No. 5 slot. More to the point, should Peralta be working as steadily and as late into games as has been his and Leyland's habit?

New shortstop?

The truth is known to all parties: The Tigers hope to have a new man playing shortstop in 2013. It could be a new face acquired during the coming offseason. Or, it could be Danny Worth, whose in-the-hole force play Sunday helped save Game 2 for the Tigers.

"A tremendous play to get the force-out at second," Leyland said Sunday. "Huge, absolutely huge."

Worth turned 27 nine days ago and nothing of grandeur he displays in the field surprises the Tigers. He has soft hands, excellent range, and a powerful arm.

The question, always, has been his bat: Can a prospect who has fought during his time in the minors and Detroit to craft even a .700 OPS (on-base plus slugging percentage) be trusted to provide a net gain on Peralta?

The answer, next year anyway, is: Maybe.

But to toss Peralta from his spot, even after he has started and made it into the mid-innings, is nothing Leyland is likely to allow, even if Peralta's closeout to 2012 has been truly hideous: .507 OPS and .171 batting average in September and October, .and a 689 OPS and .239 batting average for the season.

They are chilling numbers, his and Young's late-season statistics, to say nothing of those home runs the normally peerless Benoit has allowed in 2012.

In a numbers-only world, they probably would demand a personnel shuffle or at least a revisit. But in the manager's and others' minds, this isn't a numbers-only game. Track records count. Experience matters.

Don't expect many changes to the Tigers' lineup or to its bullpen profile for the duration of this team's playoff march. The manager, as the old cowboy adage goes, will dance with the girl who brung him.

Deficient defensively, Delmon Young not likely a returning Tiger

October 10, 2012

By Tom Gage / The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif. — Even while the Tigers say hello to success, a few goodbyes are imminent.

The season, quite clearly, is far from over. There could be more celebrations to come.

But whatever the scene is next year at this time — and make no mistake, the Tigers' core is plenty strong enough to pop corks for years to come — there are changes coming.

Delmon Young will be one of those changes.

He's the Tigers' designated hitter, as you know. But also as you know, Victor Martinez is waiting to take over his old job after missing this season because of knee surgery.

Young isn't signed for next year. It's doubtful the Tigers are interested in making him an outfielder again. So it's likely he'll become a free agent.

Young is an enigma — a player who's not quoted often because he's dismissive of print reporters. He doesn't suffer fools lightly and appears to consider many of the questions he's asked — or used to be asked — to be foolish.

Several reporters no longer attempt to converse with him because it's simply not worth the aggravation.

Unfortunately, Young shortchanges himself because he's smart. If he were more pleasant, he'd be quite quotable because he knows the game, has experienced the ups and downs of playing it, and when television cameras are around, he has good answers.

When it's only notebooks, though, he shows little patience.

Therefore it's all too easy to pass by his contributions as if they don't exist.

But they do.

And they have.

They're not Miguel Cabrera-type numbers certainly or Prince Fielder-type numbers. You wouldn't expect them to be

But in the second half of the season, with the Tigers bouncing back from a 39-42 record at the halfway point, Young played a significant role in the comeback.

In the last half of the season, he hit a serviceable .270 with 12 home runs and 43 RBI. He ranked third on the team in second-half home runs and RBI, and fourth in total bases with 130.

"He stopped chasing bad balls," manager Jim Leyland said. "This is a guy who gives it all he's got, but he was swinging at too many bad pitches for a while."

It was in the first half that Young struggled with six home runs, 31 RBI and a .263 batting average.

It was also in the first half that his arrest in New York occurred, so there's no telling how much that played a role in his less-than-stellar start.

In the second half, however — despite a persistent penchant to hit into double plays (20 for the year, 13 in the second half) — he put up some solid numbers.

That's because Young is a solid hitter.

Not great. He's never hit .300 in a full season in the majors, never had more than 21 home runs, and has only one season of more than 100 RBI.

If you take his 162-game averages, as listed on baseball-reference.com, they are 16 home runs, 89 RBI and .284.

Solid.

Which he'll no doubt be for some other team next year.

Young just turned 27, yet he has more than six full years of major-league experience. Some team will want him. The Tigers almost certainly won't, however.

For one thing, he's making \$6.75 million this year, but played only 31 games in the outfield — compared to the 118 in which he played as a DH.

Numbers alone indicate what the Tigers think of his defensive ability.

It's not that Young has played the outfield badly this year (just two errors). It's more that he hasn't played the outfield, period.

Therefore, the combination of Martinez returning for the next two years, and Young's limitations as perceived by the Tigers, make him a former Tiger before his time.

It's odd to think of players leaving as what could be a golden season for the Tigers continues.

But for some — for one, anyway — the shirt on his back will be different.

As good as it gets: Baseball pumps new life into postseason

October 10, 2012

By Bob Wojnowski / The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif. — The Tigers entered another torrent of tension Tuesday night, and they might as well get used to it. The baseball playoffs are all about dramatic unpredictability, and the Tigers and A's are merely two examples of it.

You never know who will get hot, who will collapse, who will slug the winning sacrifice fly or uncork the game-tying wild pitch. Heck, you might as well just play remote-control roulette, because you don't even know which channel the game will be on, or at what time.

For all its foibles, baseball can't mess up the pitch-to-pitch, game-to-game pressure of the postseason. The Tigers led the series 2-0 heading into Game 3, but their eight runs in two games had been scored by thoroughly unconventional means. Only one was driven in by a hit — Alex Avila's home run in Game 1. Neither Miguel Cabrera nor Prince Fielder had an RBI, yet.

"It's been a little freaky, to be honest with you," Jim Leyland said before Game 3. "It's pretty unique that you come in here and you're up two games to none when you've only actually scored one run by way of a hit. We're going to have to hit better than that. It's baseball, and you never know how it's going to play out."

When you inspect the Tigers, they look like a team with the pieces to go a long way. Even their prevailing weakness, defense, could be mitigated because everybody is kicking the ball around in these playoffs. There were 21 errors through the first 10 games, higher than the regular-season average, and the Tigers had committed precisely zero.

The tension is unrelenting. Just ask the Yankees and Orioles, their first two games decided in the late innings. Ask Oakland's Coco Crisp, whose inexplicable drop of Cabrera's fly ball in Game 2 scored two runs and might end up being the biggest play, er, misplay of the series.

Ask Al Albuquerque, who was so revved up about retiring Yoenis Cespedes in the ninth inning of Game 2, he committed an illicit act upon the baseball, commonly known as a kiss. This shook the stuffy baseball world to its very core, which is hilarious, actually. I'm not saying what Albuquerque did was appropriate, especially with the ball still in play. I'm saying these spontaneous bursts of emotion are unavoidable at times, and that's a good thing.

I don't even mind that the A's Josh Reddick has gotten so irritable about all his strikeouts, he holds daily referendums on strike zones and opposing pitcher decorum. He was angered by Albuquerque's smooch and he expressed it, and within reason, that's fine, too.

'So unpredictable'

This is the newly enlivened baseball postseason, when a favorite (Texas) can be knocked out in a one-game showdown and a lame umpire call (Sam Holbrook's bizarre infield-outfield fly ruling) can spawn rabid debate. We're barely closing in on the championship series round and we already have crazy signature moments, from the kiss to Ichiro Suzuki's run-scoring, dimension-defying hop-slide.

For sheer nerves and twists, baseball now rivals NHL playoff hockey (aw, remember hockey?) The eighth-seeded Los Angeles Kings won the Stanley Cup, but is that any more improbable than Oakland and Baltimore being alive in the playoffs?

In the biggest game of the season so far Tuesday night, two pitchers were making their postseason debuts — the Tigers' Anibal Sanchez and the A's Brett Anderson. But there isn't even evidence that experience matters much in the playoffs.

The reigning World Series champs are the Cardinals, who got hot late last season and got a little lucky. The MVP? Relative unknown David Freese

The year before, the Giants got hot and a little lucky and captured the title. The MVP? Relative relic Edgar Renteria, certainly familiar to Tigers fans.

In the playoffs, you can't even count on the things you can count on. The Tigers were 50-31 at home, the same home record as the A's. But in the first eight games of this postseason, home teams were only 2-6 — with the Tigers notching the two victories.

"The playoffs are so unpredictable, I don't understand why people try to predict it," Avila said the other day. "Numerous times the team with the least amount of wins will win the World Series. And numerous times the team with the least amount of wins gets knocked out in the first round." The Tigers have a few more solid knowns — starting pitching, Cabrera, Fielder — than most teams. From the knowns to the unknowns, they'll need it all.

Tigers pitcher Al Alburquerque's kissing incident is overblown

October 10, 2012

By Terry Foster / The Detroit News

I love when they celebrate in the NFL. I enjoyed Chad Johnson as much as Chad Ochocinco. Terrell Owens and the Sharpie touchdown celebration made me crack up. It is one of the few arguments I get into with my wife Abs. She hates it. I love it.

But I am consistent about it. A number of you are not.

We are on board in saying the Al Alburquerque kiss and toss to first base was no big deal. He did not mean to show anybody up but it was still a showboat move. A number of Tiger fans have come down on Oakland A's outfielder Josh Reddick for calling it unprofessional.

He is right. It was unprofessional. Tigers manager Jim Leyland agrees that it was not the right thing to do. First baseman Prince Fielder called it "the coolest thing ever."

Both men are right.

A number of Tiger fans defended it and called for more fun in baseball. If that is how you feel then you have no right to blast NFL players when they celebrate and have fun. Fun is fun, right? A number of you say this is bad for the game when someone outside of Detroit does it. But you have no problem when a Tiger does it.

Exuberance vs. choreography

I know your counter. You say that a lot of NFL celebrations are planned and choreographed. That is true but the bottom line is when you are on the wrong end of a play you don't want to see things thrown in your face, whether it is spontaneous or choreographed.

The A's were locked in a back and forth battle for survival when Yeonis Cespedes hit a tapper to the mound for the final out in the ninth of a tied ball game. Alburquerque grabbed the ball and kissed it before under handing it to Fielder.

"It was just the emotion of the game," Alburquerque told Spanish reporters. "I wasn't pimping. I was very excited about getting the out, and if Cespedes was offended, I apologize to him and their players, because I wasn't trying to do anything disrespectful."

I thought it was cute. But that's me. But I also loved when Ochocinco put on the Hall of Fame jacket and proposed to a cheerleader. Many didn't like the Roy Williams first down signals mostly because he often did it when the Lions were behind.

Some hypocrisy?

By the way we need to call the Oakland A's out also. They were called unprofessional earlier this summer when they did a clap routine in the dugout during a three-home run game against the Yankees. Yanks infielder Eric Chavez said it was high schoolish, distasteful and a slap in the face.

Here is what the A's Jonny Gomes said.

"We have rookies on this team," he said. "If you take the fun away you are screwed."

Interesting. The A's are like Tiger fans. It is OK for us to showboat but don't do it to us.

The Alburquerque celebration is no big deal either unless of course Tigers leadoff man Austin Jackson takes one in the ribs tonight to begin Game 3 in Oakland.

Grading the Tigers: Lackluster offense continues to haunt Detroit Tigers in Game 3 loss to Oakland A's

October 10, 2012

By James Schmehl / MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- A look at how the pitching and offense fared in the Detroit Tigers' 2-0 loss to the Oakland Athletics in Game 3 of the American League Division Series:

STARTING PITCHING: A-

Anibal Sanchez was fantastic. Only problem? Brett Anderson was a flat-out stud.

Detroit continues to pump out quality starts with Sanchez leading the charge in Game 3.

Sanchez allowed five hits and two runs in 6 1/3 innings, struck out three and walked two. It was the third straight game a Tigers starter has limited the A's to two or fewer runs.

After a rocky first inning, which required a mound visit from pitching coach Jeff Jones, Sanchez quickly settled, retiring a string of 10 before Seth Smith homered in the fifth.

RELIEF PITCHING: A+

Three relievers combined to pitch 1 2/3 scoreless innings, and -- despite trailing by two runs -- they kept the game within reach.

Kudos to manager Jim Leyland, who made all the right moves, including bringing in Octavio Dotel -- not Drew Smyly -- to face left-handed hitter Seth Smith in the seventh. At the time, Smyly was warm, having tossed in the bullpen. But, he went with Dotel, who got Smith to pop-up in foul ground and struck out Derek Norris.

The only blip? The two-out walk Phil Coke issued to left-handed hitter Stephen Drew. But it mattered little as Rick Porcello, making his postseason debut, induced an inning-ending pop-out off the bat of Yoenis Cespedes on his very first pitch.

OFFENSE: F

Oakland's starting pitchers have limited Detroit to four earned runs in 18 1/3 innings this series. Feel free to read that again.

This offense is mess right now. Plain and simple. And, that mess was put on full display in Game 3 when the Tigers could only put six runners on base safely.

Tip your cap to Anderson -- his fastball was nearly untouchable. But the Tigers should be held accountable for Tuesday's flop. Their overly aggressive approach at the plate allowed Anderson to cruise through six shutout innings, despite a pitch count set at 80.

The Tigers -- as they have for much of the season -- showed little patience against a bevy of A's pitchers, and didn't threaten to score after the second inning.

To his credit, Fielder was robbed of two should-be extra-base hits, including a potential home run. Still, it's hard to ignore his .083 batting average through the club's first three games. Let's just say, there's plenty of room for growth.

DEFENSE: A

A home-run saving catch. A diving snag in left field. A handful of remarkable catches highlighted another flawless defensive all-around performance. But enough about Oakland.

Actually, for the most part, the Tigers did a fine job defensively. It was arguably their best performance this series. Why? Because they made the routine play -- and a couple exceptional ones, led by Andy Dirks in left field.

Besides a ridiculously tough over-the-shoulder catch in the second inning, Dirks made an above-average catch on a liner that had plenty of late movement in the third. And, for the third straight game, no Tigers player committed an error.

Detroit Tigers still in good shape to advance after Game 3 loss, but offensive struggles are troubling

October 10, 2012

By Chris Iott / MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- The Detroit Tigers are not panicking.

They shouldn't. They hold a 2-1 lead in their American League Division Series against the Oakland A's. They need to win just one of their next two games. They have their best two starters lined up to start in them.

But they need to shake off their offensive struggles ... and soon.

The Tigers went 0-for-2 with runners in scoring position Tuesday night, which made it one of those rare occasions when the number on the right side of that stat -- the "2" -- was more troubling than the "0" on the left. Miguel Cabrera, Prince Fielder and Delmon Young combined for one at-bat with a runner on base, and that didn't happen until Fielder stepped to the plate with one out in the ninth. Even then, Cabrera was on first and not in scoring position.

The Tigers managed just four hits -- all singles -- in a 2-0 loss Tuesday night to the Oakland A's. Since they had so few hits, we have space here to look at them individually:

With one out in the second inning, Young singled to center field.

Jhonny Peralta, the next batter, singled on a liner to right to put runners on first and second. (This, it is worth noting, was the most serious scoring threat the Tigers had all night.)

With two outs in the seventh inning, Peralta singled to center.

With one out in the ninth, Cabrera singled to right. Fielder followed by grounding into a game-ending double play.

That was it for the Tigers, who were shut out just twice in the regular season.

"They pitched and played a perfect game," Tigers manager Jim Leyland said. "You have to tip your hat to them. Nothing you could do about it."

Tigers fans are tired of tipping their hats. The Tigers have done that all too often this season, sometimes against mediocre starters.

It's frustrating, but that's a good team you're playing. They're going to make those plays. That's why they're here.

But Brett Anderson is no ordinary starter. He's a talented young left-hander who posted a 2.57 ERA in six starts this season after recovering from Tommy John surgery. (ESPN baseball analyst Jim Bowden said during the game via his Twitter account: "Brett Anderson will win a Cy Young in his career ... book it.")

Anderson was making his first appearance since Sept. 19 due to a right oblique injury, but Leyland was not surprised that he was effective.

"Not really, because (A's manager) Bob Melvin is pretty smart," Leyland said. "If he had not felt totally comfortable with him, he would not have pitched him in this game. I expected him to be good. He's a very good pitcher. I thought he had an excellent curveball."

The Tigers had just two at-bats with a runner in scoring position in the game, both against Anderson. After the singles by Peralta and Fielder in the second, Andy Dirks hit into a fielder's choice for the second out of the inning. That put runners at first and third with two outs for Avisail Garcia, who grounded out to Anderson.

The Tigers never had a runner reach second base in the final seven innings.

Runs are at a premium in the postseason, and that has been the case for both teams through three games of the ALDS. The Tigers have scored just eight runs, the A's just seven.

But the Tigers have just one-scoring hit: a solo home run by Alex Avila in Game 1. They have scored three runs on errors and one each on a ground out, a double-play ball, a wild pitch and a sacrifice fly. Even if they finish off the A's on Wednesday night, they need to find their groove offensively or they could find themselves fighting an uphill battle in an AL Championship Series matchup with the Yankees or Orioles.

On the bright side for the Tigers, they should be done in the ALDS with left-handed starters, who seem to be very problematic for them. A.J. Griffin is set to start Game 4, and Jarrod Parker is the likely starter for a

potential Game 5. The Tigers have Max Scherzer and Justin Verlander set to pitch the next two games, should both games be needed.

Also, even though Fielder went 0-for-4, he deserved much better.

Fielder got absolutely robbed when Coco Crisp made a ridiculous catch to steal a home run in the second inning. He got slightly robbed when Stephen Drew made a nice play to retire him on what looked to be a single up the middle in the fourth. Then Fielder was robbed again when Yoenis Cespedes made a diving catch on a ball hit to the gap in the seventh.

"It's frustrating, but that's a good team you're playing," Fielder said. "They're going to make those plays. That's why they're here."

In hindsight, the play Crisp made might have been a game-saver for the A's, who scored in the bottom of the first and would have seen the Tigers regain momentum had Fielder's ball left the yard.

Instead, when Josh Donaldson led off the second, it marked the first time in the series the A's came to bat to start an inning with the lead. They never let it slip away, thanks to Anderson and an impressive outing by the A's bullpen.

Sure, Tigers hitters struggled. But the A's really did play a perfect game.

"Give credit to them," Peralta said. "They played good baseball. We need to come in ready for tomorrow and see what happens. Tomorrow is a different day."

Dirks agreed.

"They won one here," he said. "Tomorrow's the next game. We don't really worry about what's happened in the past. We never have and we're not going to now just because they won a game."

The Tigers shouldn't worry about losing a game. It happens, and dwelling on it won't change anything. But Tigers fans should be excused if they are concerned about how the offense has fared so far. And that concern will continue to grow, at least until the number of Tigers runs and hits grow.

Detroit Tigers manage just four hits, suffer 2-0 loss to Oakland A's in Game 3 of ALDS

October 10, 2012

By Chris Iott / MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- The Detroit Tigers manufactured just enough offense to win the first two games of their American League Division Series against the Oakland A's.

They didn't do much of anything in Game 3.

The Tigers had just four hits -- all singles -- and suffered a 2-0 loss to the A's on Tuesday night.

The Tigers still hold a 2-1 series lead over the A's and will take another shot at clinching the series Wednesday night in Game 4.

The Tigers managed just two hits -- back-to-back singles in the second inning -- against A's starter Brett Anderson, who threw six shutout innings.

KEY TO THE GAME

The Tigers have just one run-scoring hit -- a solo home run by Alex Avila in Game 1 -- in three ALDS games. Their offensive struggles didn't get much attention since they won the first two games, but the Tigers need to get the offense going if they are going to finish off the A's and advance to the AL Championship Series.

TIGERS' HIGHLIGHTS

-- The Tigers made a couple nice defensive plays in the bottom of the second inning. Andy Dirks made a very good running catch on a line drive hit to the warning track with a runner on and no outs. Gerald Laird threw out Derek Norris stealing for the final out of the inning.

-- Anibal Sanchez pitched very effectively for the Tigers, allowing just two runs on five hits and two walks in 6 1/3 innings. He struck out three.

TIGERS' LOWLIGHTS

-- The first three A's to bat reached base as Oakland took an early 1-0 lead. Coco Crisp singled to right before Sanchez walked Stephen Drew. Yoenis Cespedes singled up the middle just out of the reach of Omar Infante to score Crisp from second base. Sanchez escaped further damage when he struck out the next batter he faced, then got Josh Reddick to ground into a double play.

-- Seth Smith ended a string of nine consecutive A's hitters retired by Sanchez when he hit a 2-2 fastball from Sanchez over the wall in right-center to give the A's a 2-0 lead in the fifth inning. It was the third home run for Smith in 15 career at-bats against Sanchez.

-- Anderson had not pitched since Sept. 19 due to a right oblique injury, but the Tigers didn't work the count very well in the first inning. Anderson struck out the first two batters he faced and retired the Tigers in order on eight pitches.

-- A's reliever Sean Doolittle blew away the Tigers in the eighth inning. He used an overpowering fastball to strike out all three batters he faced: Avisail Garcia, Gerald Laird and Austin Jackson.

OTHER NOTES

-- It appeared as if Prince Fielder had tied the game at 1-1 in the top of the second inning when he hit a line drive to center field that had home run written all over it. But Crisp made an amazing catch as he crashed into the wall to rob Fielder of a home run.

-- Fielder actually could have had hits in each of his first three at-bats. After Crisp stole the home run, Fielder hit a grounder up the middle in the fourth inning that Stephen Drew made a nice play on. In the seventh, Fielder hit a line drive toward the gap in left-center, but Cespedes made a diving catch.

-- Anderson allowed just two hits and two walks while striking out six in six shutout innings. After Jhonny Peralta singled with one out in the second, the Tigers did not hit another ball out of the infield against Anderson. Of the 14 batters Anderson faced from that point forward, just two reached base. Both of them were on walks.

-- The A's ended a six-game playoff losing streak to the Tigers. The Tigers swept them in four games in the 2006 ALCS before beating them in the first two games of the ALDS this year.

A's Coco Crisp makes mind-blowing catch to rob Prince Fielder of surefire homer in Game 3

October 10, 2012

By James Schmehl / MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Coco Crisp giveth in Game 2, and Coco Crisp taketh away in Game 3.

A game after his late-inning error cost the Oakland Athletics two key runs Sunday, Crisp made up for the miscue Tuesday night by making arguably the catch of the postseason.

Trailing 1-0, Tigers first baseman Prince Fielder crushed a breaking ball to deep center off A's left-hander Brett Anderson in the second inning that had the distance and height to clear the wall.

Enter: Crisp.

Crisp covered nearly 50 yards in -- what seemed like -- four seconds flat and made a leaping Hail Mary-type catch before crashing into the wall and falling to the ground.

"You see him hit it and you put your head down because you think you gave up a home run," Anderson said.

"Then you see him plow through there and catch the ball and it kind of kick starts you to go out there and make pitches."

Replays on TBS showed that the ball would've cleared the wall.

Fielder had a grin on his face as he rounded first base, slowing to a slow trot after recognizing Crisp had made the highlight-reel catch to preserve the one-run lead.

"It was a good play," Fielder said. "That's what he's supposed to do."

Crisp celebrated the catch, raising his arm to signal he'd made the grab.

"Coco's catch was the one that was out of the ballpark and came back," manager Jim Leyland said. "The key to that was they played deep. Had he been playing a normal centerfield or just a couple of steps back he probably wouldn't have got there to make the catch. It was a great catch. I mean, there's no question about it."

It was a bit of redemption for Crisp, whose seventh-inning error in Game 2 allowed the Tigers to take a 3-2 lead after he dropped Miguel Cabrera's shallow fly with two outs.

The failed basket catch allowed Austin Jackson and Omar Infante to score in a game that they'd eventually win 5-4.

Fielder was the biggest victim of Oakland's, robbed three times, including a should-be double that Yoenis Cespedes took away with a diving catch in the left-center field gap.

"It's frustrating but that's a good team you're playing," Fielder said. "They're going to make those plays. That's why they're here."

Detroit Tigers' Jim Leyland won't discuss job situation, says 'everybody's known' that he wants to manage

October 10, 2012

By Chris Iott / MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Manager Jim Leyland is happy to make light of his job situation. What he doesn't want to do is talk about it.

A perfect example took place Tuesday afternoon as the Detroit Tigers prepared for Game 3 of the American League Division Series. Leyland spoke about what he did Monday night after leaving the Oakland Coliseum as well as what he did Tuesday before returning to the ballpark.

"I saw a couple on the trolley today with Tigers caps on," Leyland said. "I took my wife to dinner last night and I got in the cab to come home and the guy was from Pittsburgh about five minutes from where I live, the guy driving the cab. I told him I might be driving one with him."

But Leyland cut the conversation short when asked a follow-up question about recent published reports that he wants to continue managing beyond the current season.

"I'm not talking about anything about me," Leyland said. "I haven't done that all year. Everybody's known that I want to manage. That's no secret. But we're not talking about me.

"When somebody says, 'Do you want to manage?' I like to manage. But that has nothing to do with our situation."

"When somebody says, 'Do you want to manage?' I like to manage. But that has nothing to do with our situation."

Leyland clearly wants to keep the focus on the task at hand: the Tigers' playoff run. He does not want his situation to be a distraction. That makes sense. With that said, the topic is certain to be discussed as long as Leyland does not have a contract for 2013.

Of course, Leyland won't have to resort to driving a cab anytime soon. He is a respected manager who will have a job next season if he wants one.

Jon Morosi of Foxsports.com wrote Tuesday that Leyland wants to manage beyond 2012.

"Leyland, unsigned beyond the Tigers' final game this year, has said publicly that he wants to continue managing," Morosi wrote. "With each victory, the odds increase that the Tigers will want him back."

Danny Knobler of CBSSports.com wrote Monday that Leyland has been telling those close to him that he wants to return. Knobler also wrote that it is very likely that Leyland will be back for his eighth season with the Tigers.

"Leyland is still considered one of the game's best managers," Knobler wrote. "When scouts and executives from rival teams have talked about his future, one of the first questions asked is, 'How are they going to find someone better to replace him?'"

The Tigers underachieved a bit during the regular season, but they won their division for the second consecutive season. They are in the postseason in consecutive seasons for the first time since 1934-35.

The Tigers head into their game Tuesday night with three chances to eliminate the Oakland A's and head to the American League Championship Series for the second consecutive season.

It seems likely that Leyland will return next season.

Then why haven't the Tigers extended his contract already? Probably for the same reason Leyland doesn't want to talk about the situation. The Tigers are trying to win a playoff series, then another and then another. Dealing publicly with Leyland's contract would be a distraction.

The task at hand right now is winning, not talking. There will be plenty of time for that after the season ends, whenever and wherever that happens.

As expected, Detroit Tigers repeat lineup for Game 3; time announced for potential Game 5

October 10, 2012

By James Schmehl / MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- As expected, Detroit Tigers manager Jim Leyland is sticking with the same lineup for Game 3 that he used in Game 2.

He's hoping for the same result, too.

Avisail Garcia will make his second career playoff start in right field, batting eighth behind Andy Dirks, who will start in left in Game 3 of the AL division series Tuesday night.

A win against Oakland tonight and the Tigers will advance to the American League Championship Series for a second straight year. A loss and they're back Wednesday for Game 4, which is set for 9:37 p.m.

If a series-clinching Game 5 is necessary on Thursday, it will begin at 9:37 p.m, too. Both games would be televised on TNT.

Tonight's lineup is stacked with right-handed hitters in an effort to combat A's left-hander Brett Anderson, who returns from a right oblique strain he sustained falling awkwardly off the mound in a start at Detroit on Sept. 19. The A's lineup in Game 3 is the same Oakland manager Bob Melvin used in Game 1 with Derek Norris starting behind the plate, not George Kottaras, who started Game 2.

Here's tonight's lineups:

DETROIT TIGERS

1. Austin Jackson, CF
 2. Omar Infante, 2B
 3. Miguel Cabrera, 3B
 4. Prince Fielder, 1B
 5. Delmon Young, DH
 6. Jhonny Peralta, SS
 7. Andy Dirks, LF
 8. Avisail Garcia, RF
 9. Gerald Laird, C
- Anibal Sanchez, RHP.

OAKLAND ATHLETICS

1. Coco Crisp, CF
 2. Stephen Drew, SS
 3. Yoenis Cespedes, LF
 4. Brandon Moss, 1B
 5. Josh Reddick, RF
 6. Josh Donaldson, 3B
 7. Seth Smith, DH
 8. Derek Norris, C
 9. Cliff Pennington, 2B
- Brett Anderson, LHP.

Detroit Tigers fans: Al Alburquerque kissing incident was no big deal and won't backfire by inspiring A's

October 10, 2012

By Brendan Savage / MLive.com

Detroit Tigers pitcher Al Alburquerque kissing the baseball near the end of Game 2 Sunday against the Oakland A's was no big deal.

The entire incident has been overblown by the media and won't backfire on the Tigers when the ALDS resumes with Game 3 tonight in Oakland.

National analysts who think otherwise are full of baloney.

That's according to MLive.com readers who answered our poll question – Could Al Alburquerque's kissing stunt backfire on the Tigers and inspire the A's?

A whopping 2,039 readers voted in the poll and 1,168 – or 57.3 percent – said the incident was no big deal and was overblown. Another 503 believe it won't have an impact on the series whatsoever, 189 think it could possibly enter into play and only 179 (8.8 percent) think it will indeed backfire on the Tigers.

"It was completely overblown and was no big deal. When I saw what Al did I laughed," wrote reader UDM_Titan. "I mean how many times have you saw a batter hit a homer and just admire it or flip his bat when he hits a home run. Al Alburquerque is a very excitable pitcher, that is the way he is and was not trying to show-up the A's."

Had Game 3 been played Monday, one reader thinks Alburquerque's kiss would have been put to bed long ago.

"Funny if there was a game (Monday), this little incident would have been forgotten already," wrote reader tntiger64. "People need something to write or talk about. Oakland has more to worry about than that little incident. When your team leads the world in K's, and you have to face both Scherzer and Verlander, in the off chance you get by Sanchez, something so trivial is meaningless."

Major League Baseball Network analyst Omar Vizquel defended Alburquerque but also said his actions might turn out to be the "kiss of death" for the Tigers.

"The A's are not ready for the bright lights of playoff baseball, stick a fork in them," wrote reader CarlFordfan. "No kiss of death for the tigers, sorry Omar Vizquel."

Reader teebob doesn't think the incident will provide motivation for the A's even though many of them were unhappy that Alburquerque kissed the ball while looking at the Oakland dugout before throwing to first base to retire batter Yeonis Cespedes, who hit a grounder back to the mound.

'It was completely overblown and was no big deal.' -- MLive.com reader UDM_Titan.

Teebob thinks the fact that the A's are on the brink of elimination should be their primary concern, not somebody kissing a baseball.

"Hhhmmmm.....The play is over, how could it backfire," asked teebob. "Oh no, you are gonna fire a team up that should already be fired up. If the A's weren't already fired up, then they probably have other issues to deal with besides critiquing how another player celebrates an extremely tense moment that ends up being successful. Go Tigers!!!!"

A's outfielder Josh Reddick, who has struck out six times in two games, called Alburquerque's kiss unprofessional.

Many MLive.com turned that around and claim the A's are unprofessional for repeatedly complaining to umpires after striking out. Several singled out Reddick, who was caught on camera angrily slamming his bat in the dugout.

"Reddick's a whiner who's trying to deflect the fact that he's had six strikeouts vs the Tigs," wrote reader Big Dutchman. "When he threw his helmet and bat yesterday when disagreeing with the home plate ump's call, he could have been tossed. As far as Al kissing the ball, I wouldn't have recommended it but if anyone deserves the right to celebrate the final out, it's Al. Now let's finish the job and take the next one at the Coliseum.

If the A's want to be mad at a Tigers' pitcher, one reader said a better candidate might be Detroit closer Jose Valverde.

After all, the animated Valverde – aka Papa Grande – might bring more theatrics to the field than any other player in Major League Baseball.

"This is hilarious," wrote reader phil336. "So now we have to take all celebrations out of the game????? What Alburquerque did is minuscule compared to what Papa Grande does. And I did even notice it until it was pointed out. And I thought Reddick was "too dumb" to know the difference.... LOL.... those were HIS words." Hardly any readers criticized Alburquerque for kissing the ball.

But there were a few.

"I think it was a stupid thing for him to do," wrote reader tig84. "You never give any team any reason to rally....regardless of how 'not that big of a deal' it can be. A smile, wink, blown kiss...you let sleeping dogs lie. Not a smart thing for anyone on the Tigers to do. That said, grow up, shut up and quit whining to the umps and throwing your temper tantrums Reddick. 1-7 and 6 K's indicates you should be worrying about something other than a guy kissing a baseball."

What do you think?

Will the A's have the Alburquerque incident on their collective mind when they take the field tonight and could it indeed backfire on the Tigers and inspire Oakland?

Detroit Tigers' Anibal Sanchez aims to bounce back after rough start last month against Oakland A's

October 10, 2012

By Chris Iott / MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Anibal Sanchez has pitched extremely well over the past six weeks or so.

Sanchez is 3-3 with a 2.15 ERA in his past eight starts for the Detroit Tigers. He allowed more than two earned runs in just two of those eight starts.

His only poor start during that time came against the team he will face Tuesday night in Game 3 of the American League Division Series.

Sanchez will be on the mound for the Tigers as they go for a three-game sweep of the Oakland A's.

The scene at the Oakland Coliseum could be a wild one. It was certainly crazy there down the stretch as the A's went on a tear at the end of the regular season to rip the American League West Division title from the hands of the Texas Rangers.

"I don't see anything different in his repertoire to an extent. ... I think it's probably more confidence than anything."

Sanchez expects to stay focused on the task at hand.

"I don't try to focus too much about how loud it's going to be, the field," he said. "I try to focus and do my job. I try to focus to put my ball for a strike, get it hitter by hitter. That's what I do. And I don't think too much of other things. I try to focus just on one thing."

That has been effective for him lately. He got off to a bit of a slow start after joining the Tigers prior to the trade deadline, but he has pitched extremely well lately.

Sanchez has allowed just 17 runs -- 13 of them earned -- in his past eight starts dating back to mid-August. But six of those 17 runs came in one start, a 12-4 loss to the A's on Sept. 20 at Comerica Park. That is Sanchez's lone career start against the A's to date.

One of those six runs against the A's was unearned and two more came on a ball that eluded Austin Jackson in center. So, even that start wasn't all that bad.

"I think with most guys that have a track record like him it's confidence," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "You get a couple of games going in the right direction and then you feed off of that. I don't see anything different in his repertoire to an extent. ... I think it's probably more confidence than anything."

Sanchez does seem confident, and it does not stem from just one or two pitches that are working for him.

"I feel good with all my pitches," Sanchez said. "It doesn't make a difference if it's a slider, my curveball. I try to throw every pitch for a strike in any count. I don't go specially on just one pitch."

Sanchez is clearly comfortable with the Tigers, but he says he isn't even pondering the offseason, when he will be a free agent.

"Right now, I just focus on what I'm going to do (Tuesday night)," Sanchez said. "The free (agency) I know is coming, but that's my agent's job. That's why I have an agent. Right now I focus on (Tuesday night). I don't think too much what's going to happen after that."

No doubt A's can rally from 2-0 deficit but they won't do it, says ESPN analyst John Kruk

October 10, 2012

By Brendan Savage / MLive.com

After seeing Oakland win its final six games of the regular season to overtake the Texas Rangers and win the AL West Division title, John Kruk knows anything is possible with the A's.

But at the same time, the ESPN Baseball Tonight analyst doesn't see the A's rallying from a 2-0 deficit to beat the Detroit Tigers in their best-of-5 American League Division Series.

Game 3 is tonight in Oakland.

"If any team can do it, it's this team," Kruk said this morning on Baseball Tonight. "They're going to get (Tigers ace Justin) Verlander one more time. The Tigers are hoping they don't have to use Verlander again this series, (that) they can it end it quickly so he can go Game 1 in the ALCS.

"If (the A's) can get Verlander in a Game 5, then I think they have a chance. Even though Verlander is a great pitcher, he does struggle in the postseason. This is a team that, you have to remember, when they needed to win three games in a row at home, they beat Texas three games to win that division.

'I don't think they can do it.' -- John Kruk on the A's chances.

"It's not out of the realm. But the Tigers are a better team right now than Texas was at the end of the year. That's why I don't think they can do it."

Oakland manager Bob Melvin said the A's have never folded under pressure this season, losing some "dramatic games" and then coming back the next day as if nothing happened.

He said they play for the day and don't worry about tomorrow.

That attitude is one reason Baseball Tonight analyst Curt Schilling thinks the A's can indeed beat the Tigers.

"He was the bench coach on the '01 team that lost two of the most dramatic World Series games ever and came back down 3-2," Schilling said, referring to the Arizona Diamondbacks team he pitched for. "His demeanor right there is the reason they could win three win-or-go-home games.

"That, to me, is crucial."

That said, Schilling predicted the A's would be "three and done."

Tigers headed to Game 4 after being shut out

Sanchez solid for 6 1/3; Fielder victimized by two defensive gems

October 10, 2012

By Jason Beck / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The roar of a sellout crowd quashed any hope that the Tigers could stroll through town and get a win like it was a regular-season series. The energy on Brett Anderson's fastball dashed any hope of a Division Series sweep.

It's melodramatic to declare it's a series now, after Tuesday's 2-0 loss to the A's in Game 3, because the first two games were way too close to think it wasn't already. Detroit had just crept enough runs across to squeak out close games.

"We knew they weren't going to lay over," catcher Gerald Laird said. "They won their division and they got good pitching. And this kid Anderson's probably their ace. We knew it was going to be a tough test, but you've got to tip your cap."

What the Tigers have now is a battle on their hands, even with a 2-1 series advantage and Justin Verlander awaiting in a potential Game 5. They'll send Max Scherzer to the mound Wednesday night in Game 4 hoping to close it out, but they'll have to plate some runs to give him some help.

With Anderson's six scoreless innings on two hits, A's starters have held Detroit to four earned runs over 18 1/3 innings. Their only run-scoring hit so far this series is Alex Avila's solo homer in Game 1 on Saturday night.

The way Anderson pitched in his first outing since leaving his Sept. 19 outing in Detroit with an oblique injury, he didn't give the Tigers much of a chance. When he did, the A's defense was there to take it away.

It was the kind of stretch the star-studded Tigers have experienced more times than one might expect for their power. However, it was just the third time all year the Tigers have been shut out.

"They pitched and played a perfect game," Tigers manager Jim Leyland said. "You have to tip your hat to them. Nothing you could do about it."

If Coco Crisp's leaping catch at the fence in right-center field didn't rob Prince Fielder of a home run, it dramatically altered the rest of the inning given the back-to-back singles that followed from Delmon Young and Jhonny Peralta. Not only did Anderson not allow a hit after that stretch, he didn't allow a ball out of the infield. Nine groundouts, two strikeouts and two walks followed.

Fielder had two more hard hits after that. In the fourth inning, his ground ball up the middle, seemingly headed through an infield shift, became another of Stephen Drew's stellar plays as he ran it down and fired to first.

Once left fielder Yoenis Cespedes made a diving catch on Fielder's seventh-inning liner toward the gap, preventing a leadoff double off Ryan Cook, all Fielder could do was take off his batting gloves and head to the dugout.

His teammates knew the feeling. The Tigers put six runners on base safely. Peralta was responsible for three of them, producing two singles and a walk.

"You can go out and pitch to contact, and not worry about the results as much," Anderson said. "Coco set the tone with robbing the homer. You don't expect that when you're pitching. But he was tremendous. The guys up the middle were tremendous."

Anibal Sanchez, making his first career postseason start, did all he could to keep the Tigers close, using a darting breaking ball to recover after a walk and two singles greeted him with a 1-0 A's lead in the first inning. Sanchez retired nine consecutive A's and had a 2-2 count on Seth Smith when he shook off a sign and delivered a fastball, which Smith hit out of the park to straightaway center field in the fifth.

It was Smith's career third home run off Sanchez, and it improved him to 7-for-15 off his former National League foe.

"I don't know what it is," Smith said. "There's no secret to my success against him. It's just baseball, and some guys you see better than others. And maybe my swing has been in a good place every time I faced him, I don't know."

Sanchez acquitted himself well, delivering 6 1/3 innings of two-run ball on five hits before Leyland went to his bullpen once Smith came back up in the seventh. Sanchez became the first Tiger in history to make his postseason debut with that kind of pitching line and lose.

"I think I just came here today to throw my best game, like I always do," Sanchez said. "Today we have to give credit to their pitchers. They worked good and they threw a good ballgame today."

The Tigers were shut out and shut down for extra-base hits, and they struck out four consecutive times from the eighth inning into the ninth against Oakland relievers Sean Doolittle and Grant Balfour. Yet when Miguel Cabrera singled in the ninth, Fielder stepped to the plate once more as the potential tying run. This time, Balfour jammed him into a game-ending double play. It was that kind of night.

Sanchez feels at home in postseason road start **Right-hander allows two runs over 6 1/3 in first playoff test**

October 10, 2012

By Jason Beck / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Anibal Sanchez was a long way from Miami. Being on the opposite coast had nothing to do with it.

When the Tigers acquired him from the Marlins in the last week of July, he was relishing the chance to pitch in a playoff race before raucous crowds. He had plenty of chances in Detroit. Game 3 of the American League Division Series against the A's at the Coliseum was his chance on the road.

It was like nothing he had experienced before. And he loved it.

A's vs. Tigers

"Detroit, they have very good fans. The fans really cheer for the team. They give you a loud ovation for everything," Sanchez said after the 2-0 loss. "But that, that is so loud."

It was loud enough that he said he couldn't hear his fielders, and it was going from the first pitch. It was a roar after two hits and a walk put the A's ahead three batters into Sanchez's outing and seemingly put Sanchez on the ropes.

Pitching coach Jeff Jones and Gerald Laird visited the mound after Yoenis Cespedes' RBI single to try to give Sanchez a minute to regroup. How much he heard of their pep talk is up for debate, but the message was there. "I was just trying to tell him to keep making pitches," Laird said. "'You're one pitch away from a double-play ball,' and he was able to get a double-play ball in the first inning to get going. And I think after that he settled in."

He never quieted the crowd, but he quieted Oakland's offense, giving the Tigers a fighting chance even after Seth Smith's solo homer in the fifth inning. On a night when they could have been out of it early, Sanchez's performance kept the potential tying run no further away than the on-deck circle.

It's a team game, and never more apparent than in the postseason. But in this case, Sanchez did his part.

No pitcher in Tigers history had pitched at least 6 1/3 innings with two runs or fewer in his postseason debut and taken the loss, according to research on baseball-reference.com. It's not the way Sanchez wanted to get his name into Tigers postseason history, but it's what he's got.

"He pitched an excellent game for us, there's no question about that," manager Jim Leyland said. "He gave us more than a chance to win. They pitched a little better than we did tonight. It's pretty simple. But I thought Sanchez was fantastic."

Part of the adjustment Sanchez made was physical, but not with his mechanics. He had never pitched in Oakland during his career. When he warmed up on the bullpen mound in foul territory, it was different than the regular mound. Others, including Justin Verlander, have noted that in the past.

"I come from the bullpen and the bullpen is not straight," Sanchez said. "And you go to the mound and it's straight. But I made my adjustment after the second inning and did my job."

Once Sanchez's defense helped him overcome a leadoff single in the second inning, from an off-balance throw by Miguel Cabrera to an over-the-shoulder catch by Andy Dirks to Laird throwing out Derek Norris trying to steal second, Sanchez found a rhythm, retiring nine consecutive A's in the process to take a 1-0 game into the fifth.

He not only had a darting breaking ball to go with his mid-90s fastball, but he had an ability to pound the strike zone with them. He put three consecutive third-inning hitters in 0-2 counts before retiring them. After falling behind all five first-inning batters, he threw first-pitch strikes to eight straight hitters, then led off the fifth by getting Josh Donaldson to fly out to right.

"With this team, you have to miss [bats] a lot," Sanchez said. "You have to miss a lot, but you have to throw strikes. That's what I did."

That's what Sanchez was trying to do when he got to a 2-2 count on Smith, the one hitter in Oakland's lineup with extensive success against him from their time in the National League -- Sanchez in Miami, Smith in Colorado.

Sanchez threw back-to-back curveballs to put Smith in a two-strike count, but didn't like his chances going to it again. He shook off signs to get to a fastball, hoping to put one down and in where he could get a swing and miss.

"Yeah, we talked about it [later] in the dugout," Laird said. "He thought he threw quite a few breaking pitches to him and thought he could get a fastball by him. ... He just kind of left it a little too much [over the] plate and down, and he put a good swing on it."

Said Smith: "He threw a cutter in and a couple of curveballs away and it's 2-2 and he tried the throw a hip-shot sinking fastball and left it over the plate and I was able to hit the ball well."

That was it for the damage. That was all that was needed. It wasn't the result Sanchez wanted, but it was the postseason experience he had waited years for.

"It's very fun," Sanchez said. "That's the fans. I've never been here. The A's have very good fans. It's really fun when you hear a lot of them. You can't hear anything from your teammates. You just hear fans yelling. But it's really fun."

Scherzer looks to punch Tigers' ticket to ALCS

October 10, 2012

By Barry M. Bloom / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Max Scherzer sat in the Tigers' dugout on Tuesday night at the O.co Coliseum hoping upon hope that he wouldn't have to make his Wednesday start against the A's in Game 4 of the best-of-five American League Division Series.

Had the Tigers won, they'd have swept the A's and Scherzer would have been happy to make his next start against either the Yankees or Orioles sometime during the AL Championship Series. But the Tigers lost Game 3, 2-0, and now it's Scherzer's turn. He'll face Oakland right-hander A.J. Griffin at 9:30 p.m. ET on TNT.

A's vs. Tigers

"Yeah, that's how it was," Scherzer said on Tuesday night. "I was the biggest cheerleader today, hoping that we would win. I mean, it is a little bit weird not wanting to pitch. But at the end of the day, the team comes first, and obviously we wanted to win today. Given that obviously we weren't able to come through, so now it's my turn to go out there and give the team a chance to win."

Scherzer's turn in the rotation was skipped in late September because of nagging soreness in his right shoulder, and then twisted his right ankle a week ago at Kansas City when the Tigers celebrated on the field after winning their second consecutive AL Central title.

Tigers manager Jim Leyland was going to hold Scherzer out of the season finale, but the righty wound up throwing four innings against the Royals, allowing no runs on three hits, while walking two and striking out three.

"He feels great," Leyland said. "How long he'll be able to go will have something to do with the Oakland hitters. We'll play that by ear. But health-wise, he's very healthy. He's 100 percent. He threw about 75, 80 pitches over in Kansas City. So we'll monitor him closely. But I expect him to be full bore, all out, and the game will dictate how long he pitches."

Scherzer agreed that he feels good.

"My deltoid has been fine," he said. "I was able to get treatment and after the second setback we really took care of it. I needed more rest, and that's what we gave it. Making that start, it was very important for me to get back out there. I'm at 100 percent. It's recovered fine. And I've been good ever since."

A's manager Bob Melvin knows Scherzer well. Melvin was skipper of the D-backs when Scherzer was their first-round pick, 11th overall, in the 2006 First-Year Player Draft. A raw talent and highly touted right from the beginning, the Arizona baseball brain trust at the time worried about Scherzer's stamina and shoulder strength, limiting his pitch count after he missed some time early in his career with arm problems.

"Yeah, he has a pretty impressive arm," Melvin said. "He extends it probably a little unique to anybody else. I remember the first time I actually played catch with him, the ball gets on you a lot quicker than it appears because of the extension that he creates. He gets out there a little bit farther than most guys do. I think the only question in Arizona: Was he going to be a closer type or was he going to be a starter? And he probably could have been either. He's developed into quite a starter. I know they're happy to have him. He's a tough competitor on top of it."

The D-backs decided not to wait on Scherzer, making a part of a three-way trade that benefited all of the teams. On Dec. 8, 2009, the D-backs sent Scherzer and left-hander Daniel Schlereth to the Tigers, who also obtained center fielder Austin Jackson from the Yankees. The Yankees got center fielder Curtis Granderson from the Tigers and sent right-hander Ian Kennedy to the D-backs. Arizona completed the deal by picking up right-hander Edwin Jackson from Detroit. Jackson has moved on and is now pitching for the Nationals.

Scherzer's first start in the postseason came last year in Game 2 of the Tigers' five-game victory over the Yankees in the 2011 ALDS.

The 5-3 win at Yankee Stadium went like this: After a shaky 27-pitch first inning, Scherzer held the Bronx Bombers to two hits -- a pair of singles -- while walking four and striking out five. By the time he left after allowing the first two batters of the seventh inning to reach safely, he had staked his club to a 4-0 lead. Scherzer would like those kind of results on Wednesday.

"The way I've recovered over the past 10 days has been really good," Scherzer said. "Like I said, that start in Kansas City, I was able to go out there pain free, let it fly, and it felt good. I was able to recover off of that. And there shouldn't be any limitations on me tomorrow."

Tigers waiting for offense to be unleashed

October 10, 2012

By Barry M. Bloom / MLB.com

DETROIT -- As Prince Fielder headed for the door of the Tigers' clubhouse on Tuesday night at the Coliseum, Miguel Cabrera gave him these few words of wisdom:

"There's always manana," Cabrera said. There's always tomorrow. Cabrera, seated at a table, repeated the refrain several times as Fielder left the premises.

The Tigers can certainly rest on that hope. Cabrera and Fielder, Detroit's always menacing Nos. 3 and 4 hitters, are a combined 5-for-24 with no RBIs in the past four days after a 2-0 loss to the A's in Game 3 of the American League Division Series. Detroit still leads the best-of-five series, 2-1, and can wrap it up with a win on Wednesday at 9:30 p.m. ET in a game slated to be broadcast on TNT.

A's vs. Tigers

Cabrera, who was 1-for-4 on Tuesday night, is sizzling in the series at 4-for-12 in comparison to Fielder, who is struggling at 1-for-12 with a single and an intentional walk.

What made it even more frustrating for Fielder on Tuesday night was that the A's robbed him of three hits in his first three at-bats. A's center fielder Coco Crisp went above the fence in right-center field and grabbed Fielder's blast that opened up the second inning. In the fourth, A's shortstop Stephen Drew made fine plays up the middle on consecutive grounders hit by Cabrera and Fielder. And in the seventh, left fielder Yoenis Cespedes made a diving catch on another Fielder try for a base hit.

"It's frustrating, but these are good teams that we're playing," Fielder said about his evening. "They're going to make those plays. That's why they're here."

Asked what he thought about the Crisp play, Fielder said: "I thought I had a hit. It was a good play. That's what he's supposed to do."

The Tigers have outscored the A's by only a slim 8-7 margin so far in the series, leading manager Jim Leyland before the game to say that his team was pretty fortunate to be up 2-0 in the series.

"It's been a little freaky, to be honest with you," he said. "And when I say that, I think what's got lost in the shuffle, first of all, are the performances by all four starting pitchers so far. They've been absolutely very, very good. There's no question about that. It's pretty unique that you come in here and you're up two games to none when you've only actually scored one run by way of a hit. That's a little freaky, to be honest with you."

"And we're going to have to do better than that if we want to close this thing out at some point, whether it's tonight, tomorrow or the next day. If we're going to close it out, we're going to have to hit better, to be honest with you. That's kind of unique, yes. But it's baseball and you never know how it's going to play out."

The count went to six incredible quality starts in the series after Anibal Sanchez and Brett Anderson pitched well, matching each other the first six innings on Tuesday night. And Leyland is correct. The Tigers have scored only one of their eight runs on a hit -- Alex Avila's homer off Jarrod Parker to open the fifth inning of their 3-1 win in Detroit on Saturday night.

The other seven runs have been scored like this: a double-play grounder and an error by Parker on Saturday, and an infield grounder, a wild pitch, a two-run error by Crisp on a Cabrera popup to center and the walk-off sacrifice fly by Don Kelly in the bottom of the ninth that won Game 2, 5-4 on Sunday.

Against the left-handed Anderson on Tuesday, only one of Detroit's 18 outs was hit in the air: the Fielder shot that Crisp hauled down. Eleven outs came via grounders and Anderson struck out six. Overall, the Tigers whiffed 11 times in the game against four Oakland pitchers.

"They pitched and played a perfect game," Leyland said afterward. "You have to tip your hat to them. Nothing you could do about it. [Anderson] had a good curveball, had a very good breaking ball. I think Coco gave them a lot of momentum when he took the home run away from Fielder."

The Tigers are hitting .234 in the series after finishing the regular season third overall in the AL in batting (.268), sixth in runs scored (726), fifth in RBIs (698) and 10th in home runs (163). Thus far, they have three RBIs in three games.

A lot of it is the A's pitching. Their staff has a 1.75 ERA and has allowed 22 hits and five walks in 25 2/3 innings. But part of it is that the Tigers, thus far, haven't been able to get on track.

"We're in the playoffs," Fielder said. "Every team is going to have good pitching. Good pitching stops good hitting sometimes, but all we need to do is score more than they do one day and we'll win."

For his part, Cabrera declined to talk about it. As reporters waited for him to dress, the first winner of the Triple Crown in 45 years gestured good-naturedly with a wave of the hand: "See you guys manana."

As he said, tomorrow is another day. One in which Cabrera, Fielder and the entire Tigers offense could come unleashed.

A's turn to Griffin with backs still against wall

October 10, 2012

By Doug Miller / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Well, it turns out we've got ourselves a series.

The A's came back to their cozy climes in the Oakland Coliseum on Tuesday night and did what they've been doing a lot of around these parts: winning. With a 2-0 shutout of the Detroit Tigers, the A's staved off elimination and gained a bit of momentum heading into Game 4 of the American League Division Series, Wednesday night at 9:30 ET on TNT.

They realize they've got a long way to go. Even if they tie up the series, they'll have to deal with Detroit ace Justin Verlander in Game 5, and Verlander was phenomenal in Game 1 in Comerica Park, striking out 11 A's in seven innings.

But Oakland approached Tuesday concentrating on winning one game, and that's what A's manager Bob Melvin said they'd do Wednesday.

In fact, when he was asked if he felt that Tuesday's win would get the A's added momentum, Melvin gave his shortest answer of the postgame news conference.

"Gets us to tomorrow," he said. "We'll go at it in the same fashion that we did tonight. And we'll go from there."

Detroit will do the same, having been the Game 3 victim of a fresh starter in A's lefty Brett Anderson, who returned from a stint on the sidelines and delivered six scoreless innings, not to mention a resurgent A's defense. Coco Crisp, who had dropped a short Miguel Cabrera fly ball in Game 2 that led to two runs, took a run away from Prince Fielder on Tuesday when he leaped at the wall and caught a deep fly in the second inning. In the seventh inning, Fielder was robbed of extra bases when Oakland left fielder Yoenis Cespedes dove to snare a sinking liner off his bat.

Just as the A's found out in Detroit while falling into an 0-2 hole, being home can have its advantages.

"I think you're seeing the atmosphere in Detroit, [the] atmosphere in Oakland," Tigers manager Jim Leyland said. "If you look around, all the teams have great atmosphere at this time of the year. ... They've got the yellow towels. And we had the white pompoms going. The atmosphere is going to be great no matter where you play this time of year. They played a perfect game. You tip your hat to them."

The Tigers are starting another right-handed strikeout specialist in Game 4 in Max Scherzer. The A's are starting another rookie in 24-year-old A.J. Griffin. After three nail-biters, it would be unwise to expect a blowout either way.

One thing to bank on, however, is that the A's are facing elimination again and the fans at the O.co Coliseum will be trying to prevent that notion themselves. They'll be loud, and that's just the way the A's like it.

"I think each day [our confidence is] growing," A's closer Grant Balfour said. "The more we win, the better we feel, obviously -- the closer we are to being where we want to be. We're not getting too far ahead of ourselves.

"They've still got two games and we've got one. We're going to go out there tomorrow, we're going to play the way we did today, and I like our chances. We're going to go at it hard."

Tigers: Scherzer says he's strong

Scherzer said he's had plenty of time to recover from the recent soreness in his right shoulder that caused him to skip a start in late September, and he's over the ankle woes he sustained while celebrating the night the Tigers clinched the AL Central.

"My deltoid has been fine," said Scherzer, who went 16-7 with a 3.74 ERA this year and struck out 231 batters in 187 2/3 innings. "I was able to get treatment and after the second kind of setback, and after that we really took care of it. I needed more rest. And that's what we gave it.

"And so seeing how I was able to respond to it, have it be able to pitch at 100 percent, it's recovered fine. And I've been good ever since."

- Third baseman and AL Triple Crown winner Miguel Cabrera went 1-for-4 in Game 3 and has reached base safely in each of his 14 postseason games with the Tigers. That's the third-longest streak in Detroit history, behind Hank Greenberg (18) and Charlie Gehringer (16).

- Shortstop Jhonny Peralta hit .212 (55-for-259) in 72 games on the road this season, but he was the only Tigers player with more than one hit in Game 3. Peralta went 2-for-2 and drew a walk to improve his ALDS average to .444.

A's: Griffin looking to bounce back

Griffin was willing to joke a bit when discussing how far he's come so quickly, having vaulted all the way to a Game 4 postseason start a year after he was pitching in the playoffs for Class A Stockton.

"The California League and the Major Leagues are pretty comparable," he said. "I'm just kidding. ... I didn't have a press conference this time last year like this or [anything]. But [the key is] just try to go out there and just have fun and be loose, not put too much pressure on yourself. It's still a game. You go out there and just try to enjoy it."

Griffin will be looking to improve upon his last start, in which he gave up five runs (four earned) on seven hits in 2 2/3 innings in the game the A's would eventually win, 12-5, over Texas to wrap up the division title on the last day of the season.

"Against the Rangers last outing, I felt like I was making some good quality pitches, but they did a good job of staying on the pitches and just putting them in play," Griffin said. "And the ball just seemed to just evade our fielders, but in baseball that's how it goes sometimes. You've got to keep your head up and just go out there and keep playing."

- Griffin took his only defeat of the season in Detroit on Sept. 18, when he gave up five runs on eight hits in 4 2/3 innings.

- The A's shutout of the Tigers in Game 3 was the 11th postseason shutout in franchise history and the first since Oct. 11, 2001, against the Yankees in Game 2 of the ALDS.

Worth noting

- The Tigers were shut out only twice in the regular season, the fewest of any team in the Majors. They were the last team in the Majors to be shut out, going 90 games from Opening Day to July 17, when the Angels held them without a run at Comerica Park.

- The A's have never come back from a 2-0 deficit to win a postseason series, and they had been swept in six of the previous seven in which they'd lost the first two. The only time they had come back to win a game was in the 1988 World Series, when Oakland took Game 3 against the Dodgers before losing the following two.

Leyland confirms desire to continue managing

October 10, 2012

By Jason Beck / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The Tigers and manager Jim Leyland both say they'll address his contract situation once their season ends. Leyland in particular doesn't want his status to become a distraction for his team during its postseason run.

That said, he might have put to rest the speculation that he might decide to walk away. After a report from CBSSports.com's Danny Knobler said Leyland has been telling friends he doesn't plan on retirement at season's end, Leyland said as much to reporters.

A's vs. Tigers

"Everybody's known that I want to manage," Leyland said during his Tuesday pregame session at Oakland Coliseum. "It's no secret."

It wasn't that clear at times, given how many occasions in recent weeks he used the word "if" when talking about next season.

Leyland is finishing up a one-year contract he signed last August. When his contract wasn't extended at the same point this season, it became apparent that something was a factor, believed to be the Tigers' postseason status. His contract status has remained up in the air since.

Even if Leyland was safe from an organizational decision, there was some speculation he could step aside if the Tigers win the World Series, going out the same way his good friend Tony La Russa did last year after the Cardinals won it all.

At this point, Leyland appears committed to the year-to-year contracts La Russa signed in St. Louis until he stepped away.

Tigers open to re-signing Sanchez

OAKLAND -- When the Tigers acquired Anibal Sanchez in July, the widespread belief -- furthered by indications in the organization -- was that he was a two-month rental for Detroit to bolster its rotation for the division race and the postseason. If anybody in the trade had a longer-term fit, it was Omar Infante, under contract through next season to fill the hole at second base.

That might no longer be the case. Or maybe it never was.

A day after team president/general manager Dave Dombrowski told the Detroit News that Sanchez is "a player we'd like to keep," he told MLB.com that he acquired Sanchez with the idea of being open toward re-signing him beyond this season.

Dombrowski didn't want to talk in depth about Sanchez's situation, preferring to avoid the potential distraction during the Tigers' postseason run. Still, he confirmed they're definitely open to a new contract for the soon-to-be free agent.

Sanchez does not want to talk about his contract situation until season's end, but he has indicated at various points that he has enjoyed pitching in Detroit in front of large crowds with playoff expectations. Those who know Sanchez indicate he has been treated well since coming over from Miami.

That doesn't mean Sanchez is a lock for next season. He's set to hit the market as one of the top free-agent starters not named Zack Greinke. And the Tigers under Dombrowski have never spent big on a free-agent starter, preferring to build their rotation from within while adding young pitchers before they hit big-market salaries.

The Tigers will head into the offseason with five starters under team control for next season, but four of them set for bigger money. Justin Verlander will make \$20 million again next season and the year after, while Max Scherzer, Rick Porcello and Doug Fister are all up for arbitration. Drew Smyly is the lone cost-controlled starter.

If the Tigers re-sign Sanchez, it would appear likely to come at the expense of one of their arbitration-eligible starters.

Leyland says Melvin, Showalter top AL managers

OAKLAND -- Tigers manager Jim Leyland has had no shortage of praise for his old Minor League catcher, A's manager Bob Melvin, for the job he has done turning around the record and the culture in Oakland. On Tuesday, with the A's potentially a loss away from their magical season coming to an end, Leyland went a step further.

"Not to put the cart before the horse, but I hope that [Orioles manager] Buck Showalter and Bob Melvin are Co-Managers of the Year this year," Leyland said. "I think this would be a year there should be two guys get the award, I would say this would be the year."

If the Tigers move on to the American League Championship Series, Leyland could be going up against Showalter, whose Orioles headed to New York with their AL Division Series tied at a game apiece. They'll play Game 3 on Wednesday at Yankee Stadium.

Fittingly, the Tigers beat out another team led by a Manager of the Year candidate, Robin Ventura's White Sox, to win the AL Central.

Quick hits

- Leyland's one-liner of the night came when he was asked about his initial reaction when the Tigers signed Prince Fielder in January.

"The first thing I thought," he said, "was that we found a whole bunch of money in a short period of time because we couldn't even sign a relief pitcher for a million dollars about a week before that. So evidently we sold a lot of Little Caesars [pizzas] in a short period of time. And I'm glad we did."

- Miguel Cabrera has reached base safely in all 14 of his postseason games with the Tigers, the third-longest streak in franchise history. Hank Greenberg set the Tigers' standard with an 18-game streak, while Charlie Gehringer had a 16-game stretch.

- Don Kelly's game-winning sac fly on Sunday made him the third player in Major League history to deliver a walk-off RBI in a postseason game after entering as a pinch-runner. Aaron Boone did it with his memorable home run for the Yankees to win Game 7 of the 2003 ALCS. Houston's Chris Burke did it in Game 4 of the 2005 National League Division Series.

Tigers outplayed by upstart A's in Game 3

October 10, 2012

By Michael Martinez / FOXSports.com

OAKLAND, Calif. — There wasn't a champagne bottle in sight Tuesday night, not in the Detroit Tigers clubhouse. They may have come here intending to celebrate, to pop a few corks and douse each other with bubbly, but it will have to wait.

The question is, for how long? The Oakland A's have done the unexpected this season, but can they now pull off the improbable? Can they come from two games down in a best-of-5 series against the Tigers?

They aren't looking at it that way. They are doing what they always have, living in the moment and refusing to think too far ahead. But after a 2-0 win in a raucous Oakland Coliseum, they must believe anything is possible. "We're just trying to take it one game at a time," outfielder Coco Crisp said. "Today was a big win for us. We're going to sleep on it. We're not going to get too high, we definitely didn't get too low, and that's been our mentality the whole year."

It has served them well. The Tigers may still win this series, perhaps Wednesday to avoid a fifth game, but the A's proved they're not going to succumb easily.

This is a team that came from five games back with nine to play to sweep the Texas Rangers for the AL West title. It's a team devoid of major stars, but its roster of rookies and no-name veterans had the best record in the majors (72-38) after June 2.

"We knew they weren't going to roll over," Tigers catcher Gerald Laird said. "We knew they were going to come out and play tough."

The A's did. Left-hander Brett Anderson threw a two-hit shutout over six innings. Crisp stole a home run from Prince Fielder with a leaping catch at the wall in the second, and left fielder Yoenis Cespedes took another hit away from Fielder with a diving catch in the seventh. Designated hitter Seth Smith, 0 for 6 in the series, hit a towering homer to center field in the fifth.

Everything the A's couldn't do in the first two games they did in Game 3. They were fast and loose, as always, even with so much pressure on them.

"We had a lot of fun earlier before we went out" to play, manager Bob Melvin said. "The group was like they always are; that's something we encourage. And during batting practice, the same way. I think there was a good feeling about that."

They were also lifted by a sellout crowd of 37,090 that waved towels, booed the Tigers during pregame introductions and pushed the decibel level to something you'd hear at a rock concert.

"They came out in full force from the get-go and got jacked up and the adrenalin (was) flowing," Anderson said. "The fans kept us in it the whole game."

Crisp was a force, too, chasing down Fielder's soaring fly ball and jumping at the wall to bring back a home run. While it didn't remove the memory of the fly ball he dropped Sunday in Detroit, it was undeniably a confidence builder.

"To be able to make a play like that definitely resets you mentally," he said. "Obviously, it doesn't erase what happened in the previous game, but it definitely builds your confidence back up, and I'm grateful I was able to come up with that."

So was Anderson, who struggled briefly in the second inning but retired 12 of the last 14 batters he faced.

This is a pitcher who started just six times all season. He underwent Tommy John surgery on his left elbow in June 2011, returned in August, then suffered a right oblique strain Sept. 19. Basically, he couldn't stay healthy.

"We always feel good about him when he takes the mound," Melvin said. "We monitored him closely as far as his bullpen (sessions) went. I don't know how you could expect more than we got out of him tonight."

The Tigers got an effective performance from their starter, Anibal Sanchez, who pitched into the seventh inning but took the loss. Now they're facing a critical fourth game that they must win or risk taking the series to its final game.

"We want to win tomorrow, and that's where our focus is at," left fielder Andy Dirks said. "We're not even worried about the next game or the next game or the next game. That's how you are the whole season. It's always the game in front of you. That's how we're looking at it right now."

And the A's -- well, they believe that maybe the momentum has shifted in their favor. They've come from behind once, they can do it again.

"Being back home in this stadium, with our fans, we're feeling really good about going into tomorrow," reliever Sean Doolittle said.

Maybe they should. If not, the Tigers have their champagne ready.

Athletics' pitchers shut down potent Tigers

October 10, 2012

By Jorge L. Ortiz / USA Today.com

OAKLAND — Of the eight runs the Detroit Tigers scored in the first two games of their American League Division Series, seven came home without the aid of a hit, and three courtesy of Oakland Athletics errors. On Tuesday the A's played a clean game — actually, "a perfect game" in the eyes of Tigers manager Jim Leyland — and as a result they won for the first time in this series, posting a 2-0 victory that snapped their six-game postseason losing streak.

Brett Anderson came back from an injury absence of nearly three weeks to shut down Triple Crown winner Miguel Cabrera and the Tigers with the help of some brilliant glove work.

The Tigers still lead 2-1, with Wednesday night's Game 4 matching right-hander Max Scherzer against Oakland rookie A.J. Griffin.

Two days after center fielder Coco Crisp made a two-run error that facilitated Detroit's 5-4 victory in Game 2, he gained a measure of redemption with a sensational grab.

With the A's leading 1-0 in the second, Crisp stole a home run from Tigers cleanup hitter Prince Fielder by ranging to the wall in center and crashing against it as he snatched the ball just as it was about to sail over.

"It was tremendous," said Anderson, who threw six innings of two-hit ball. "I made a bad pitch and he hit it like he should have, because I hung it, but fortunately it stayed, not in the ballpark, but close enough in the ballpark to be caught. That kind of propelled me to get through the rest of the innings."

Yoenis Cespedes, who drove in the game's first run with a single in the opening inning, robbed Fielder as well with a diving catch to turn a single into an out leading off the seventh inning.

Fielder, who could be excused if he smashed the water cooler in frustration, ended the game by bouncing into a double play against closer Grant Balfour.

"They played great defense from the beginning," Tigers shortstop Jhonny Peralta said. "Coco Crisp's catch energized them. And Anderson pitched well, threw a lot of good breaking balls."

Repeatedly hitting 92 mph with his fastball, mixing in sliders and fooling hitters with a curveball in the high 70s, Anderson allowed only one runner to reach scoring position. He got through the first inning on eight pitches and only faced trouble in the second.

The A's were taking a bit of a risk going with Anderson because he had not pitched since Sept. 19, the day he strained his right oblique when making his sixth start coming off Tommy John surgery. The Tigers were the opponents then, and they reached Anderson for three runs in 2 1/3 innings before he got hurt.

On Tuesday, he allowed just four baserunners while earning the victory in the first postseason start of his career. A's manager Bob Melvin said Anderson was on a limit of around 80 pitches, the total he threw, but he didn't tell the lefty.

"As he's sitting over there right now he probably still didn't know there was a pitch count," Melvin said. "He tends to argue some during the course of the game (to stay)."

There was no need to extend Anderson when the A's can count on Ryan Cook, Sean Doolittle and Balfour to take care of the final three innings. They had failed to preserve two late leads in Game 2, but on Tuesday they combined to strike out five while giving up two singles.

Their effectiveness, the sharp glove work and a little pop — Seth Smith took losing pitcher Anibal Sanchez deep in the fifth to build Oakland's cushion to 2-0 — were reminiscent of the formula the A's used to win the AL West crown in the final series of the season by sweeping the Texas Rangers.

It's the same approach they hope will pay off when Griffin, their third rookie starter in the series, takes the mound tonight.

"That's how you win postseason games, pitching and defense and timely hitting; really, how you win all games," Smith said. "We had that. We got two runs and that's all we needed. Anderson was great and our defense was too."

ALDS Tigers-A's Game 4 preview: Max Scherzer vs. A.J. Griffin

October 10, 2012

By Dayn Perry / CBSSports.com

It will be a battle of right-handers in Game 4 of the ALDS in Oakland. (Getty Images)

The A's extended the series on Tuesday night, and that means Game 4 will go down on Wednesday night (9:30 pm EST start time). At this point, the math is simple: the A's must win two more to advance, while the visiting Tigers must win only one more.

Game 4 will pit Max Scherzer (16-7, 3.74) against A.J. Griffin (7-1, 3.06). Will Scherzer rebound from his recent injury troubles? Will Griffin bounce back from a rough outing in his only career appearance against Detroit? Let's have a look ...

Scherzer vs. A's

Scherzer, coming off a case of shoulder fatigue and a celebratory ankle injury, declared himself fully ready for Game 4 after Monday bullpen session. He'll be going on six-days' rest and hasn't thrown 100 or more pitches in a start since Sept. 12.

As for the loyal opposition, Scherzer has made two starts against the A's this season, and he's allowed three runs on seven hits in a combined 8 1/3 innings pitched. For his career, Scherzer has a 3.79 ERA in four starts against the A's. However, he hasn't fared well in two career starts in whatever they're calling the Oakland Coliseum these days.

For their careers, current A's hitters have a slash line of .250/.333/.375 in 45 total plate appearances. Key match-up? Scherzer against Yoenis Cespedes figures to be an intriguing test of strengths, as Scherzer leans on his mid-90s fastball more than 60% of the time as Cespedes feasts on fastballs.

Griffin vs. Tigers

The rookie right-hander has faced the Tigers only once this season. On Sept. 18 in Detroit, the Tigers knocked him around for five runs on eight hits (three homers) in 4 2/3 innings. Griffin's game score of 30 was his worst mark of the season. Not surprisingly, current Tiger hitters have a dominating batting line of .381/.391/.857 against Griffin. At the end of the day, though, we're talking about a single start. Draw conclusions from that kind of sample at your own risk.

A's blank Tigers in must-win: Quick hits

October 10, 2012

By Dayn Perry / CBSSports.com

The A's were down 0-2 coming into Tuesday night and obviously had to win in order to stay alive. Thanks to dominating performances by Brett Anderson and the bullpen, Oakland is very much alive in the ALDS.

Hero: It was Anderson's night. In his bounce-back season after undergoing Tommy John surgery and coming off an oblique injury, he suffocated the powerful Tiger lineup across 6.0 innings. Over that span, he struck six, walked two and gave up just two hits.

Is he the best arm in system flush with them? Once again, Anderson looked like just that.

Goat: Since Detroit was limited to just four hits on the night, it was rough all around. However, the business end of the Tigers lineup -- one-through-four hitters Austin Jackson, Omar Infante, Miguel Cabrera and Prince Fielder -- combined to go a miserable 1-for-15 on the night with six strikeouts and a pair of GIDPs. Sure, Fielder was robbed of a homer and a base knock, but the body of work for the front four was quite disappointing.

Turning point: Is it possible for the turning point to come in the second inning? Sure. The A's 1-0 lead had already whipped the Coliseum crowd into a frenzy, and Coco Crisp's brilliant catch, in which he robbed Prince Fielder of a homer, seemed to affirm that this would be Oakland's night. It was a play of genuine excellence, as Crisp was off at the crack of the bat and took a flawlessly direct route to the ball. Only then did he make the highlight-reel leap. What a play.

It was over when: You had the sense that the Anderson and the shutdown Oakland bullpen weren't going to permit many runs Tuesday night, so Seth Smith's fifth-inning solo shot, which made the score 2-0, felt decisive.

Next: Game 4 in Oakland is slated for 9:30 pm EST on Wednesday.

Tuesday, October 9, 2012

Team	Player	Transaction
Toronto Blue Jays	Robert Coello	Removed From 60-Day DL, (Right elbow inflammation)
Toronto Blue Jays	Robert Coello	Outrighted to Minors

Monday, October 8, 2012

Team	Player	Transaction
New York Yankees	Dellin Betances	Removed From 60-Day DL, (Right shoulder injury)
New York Yankees	Cory Wade	Designated for Assignment
Pittsburgh Pirates	Doug Slaten	Refused Minor League Assignment - Free Agent
San Diego Padres	Ross Ohlendorf	Refused Minor League Assignment - Free Agent
Tampa Bay Rays	Brooks Conrad	Refused Minor League Assignment - Free Agent

Friday, October 5, 2012

Team	Player	Transaction
Boston Red Sox	David Ortiz	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Aggravated right Achilles strain)
Houston Astros	Travis Buck	Refused Minor League Assignment - Free Agent
Kansas City Royals	Roman Colon	Refused Minor League Assignment - Free Agent
Los Angeles Angels	Chris Iannetta	Signed, (2013-2015)(three-year extension)
Miami Marlins	Adam Greenberg	Cleared Waivers and Became a Free Agent
Milwaukee Brewers	Vinnie Chulk	Refused Minor League Assignment - Free Agent
New York Yankees	Darnell McDonald	Refused Minor League Assignment - Free Agent
Philadelphia Phillies	Freddy Galvis	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Lower back strain)
Philadelphia Phillies	Placido Polanco	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Lower back inflammation)
Philadelphia Phillies	Raul Valdes	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Torn meniscus in right knee)
Philadelphia Phillies	Vance Worley	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Loose bodies in right elbow)
Toronto Blue Jays	Aaron Laffey	Refused Minor League Assignment - Free Agent

Toronto Blue Jays

Bobby Korecky

Refused Minor League Assignment - Free Agent