

## Cards' ratings trounce NBA, NHL finals

2 HOURS AGO • BY DAN CAESAR

The NBA and NHL seasons recently concluded, and there was a clear-cut winner on St. Louis television — the Cardinals.

As usual, the championship series of the NBA trounced the title round of the NHL in ratings nationally and locally. But neither could catch the Cardinals in the St. Louis market.

According to The Nielsen Co., 10.5 percent of U.S. homes with a television tuned in, on average, to see Miami beat San Antonio in an entertaining seven-game pro basketball championship series. In St. Louis, the rating (KDNL, Channel 30) was 8.3 — 49th among the 56 major markets that were surveyed.

Nielsen also says 3.3 percent of TV households nationwide tuned in, on average, to Chicago's six-game conquering of Boston for the pro hockey title that ended Monday with the Blackhawks scoring twice in the waning moments to first tie, then win, the decisive contest. Locally the series averaged a measly 2.9 rating to rank 18th nationally. It was on NBC Sports Network for Games 2-3, KSDK (Channel 5) for the others.

So St. Louis was 21 percent under the national average for the NBA Finals and 9 percent off the U.S. figure for the NHL Finals.

What were people watching instead of these two series with national interest? The Cardinals, of course. The Redbirds played on all but two nights of both the NBA and NHL title rounds and beat the NBA by 15 percent on those nights and the NHL by a whopping 69 percent.

Taking it a step farther, the difference was even more profound in the portion of the evening when the games overlapped. According to an analysis by FSM, which televised all the Cardinals' games during that stretch (one also was on ESPN), the Redbirds outdrew the NBA by 43 percent when both telecasts were on simultaneously, and they walloped the NHL by 395 percent.

How dominant are the Cardinals? According to research conducted by FSM's Geoff Goldman, since the baseball season began Fox Sports Midwest is the most-watched channel in prime time in the market in several key demographics including men ages 18-34 and 25-54, plus all viewers ages 18-34. He also says that of the Cards were the top-rated prime-time program locally on 13 of the 15 nights they have played this month.

## Bonus Bytes: Pujols speaks out on STL, Cardinals

3 HOURS AGO • BERNIE MIKLASZ BJMIKLASZ@POST-DISPATCH.COM

After playing three games at Oakland this weekend, the Cardinals move down the California coast to Orange County for a three-game set against the Los Angeles Angels.

The series starts Tuesday, and of course Albert Pujols will be the dominant story line.

Pujols is already warming up for the occasion.

Check out this interview that Pujols did with Jon Paul Morosi at FOXsports.com ...

It's good work by Morosi, and please read it. But in the meantime, I'll chip in by presenting a few excerpts and my reaction to what Pujols had to say, good and bad:

\* Pujols praised St. Louis and Cardinals fans: "St. Louis is still a special place for me," he told Morosi. "I still have my home there. I live there in the offseason. I enjoyed playing in front of 40,000 people every day. I tried to do my best to help the organization win. I had success there. We won two World Series. We went to three. That's something you can't take from me. I had great teammates and great memories. Those are things you're always going to take with you. The reality is that city made me who I am today."

Bernie Comment: It's good that Pujols recognizes that the fans had nothing to do with his departure. His emphasis is where it should be — on the 11 wonderful seasons that Pujols enjoyed in a special bond with loyal Cardinals fans. No matter how he feels about Cardinals chairman Bill DeWitt Jr., GM John Mozeliak or others in the organization, the fans gave Pujols unconditional love (for the most part.) And even though many Cardinals fans were upset at him for leaving, nothing can be gained by ticking them off now... especially when Pujols keeps his home and charitable foundation in St. Louis. So the diplomacy from Pujols is not only welcome, it is also smart on his part. This can be interpreted as a political move on his part, but I believe Pujols is being sincere.

\* Pujols claims he isn't bitter over the divorce with the Cardinals ... except that he goes onto reveal that indeed, he is bitter:

"There's nothing bitter about it," he told Morosi. "It's tough that it didn't work out. It happens. I wasn't the first one it happens to do. It happened to Miguel Cabrera, it happened to Alex Rodriguez. It happened to Ken Griffey Jr. It happens to many players who play this game: At some time, they move along.

"I think the only thing I'm bitter about is the way the front office handled it a little bit. I think they should have handled it a little better. I'm bitter about that. They tried to make me look like I was a bad guy. But that's OK. I'm a big boy."

Morosi pressed Pujols in a follow-up: what exactly did the Cardinals' front office do?

"It's something I don't want to talk about," Pujols responded. "They know what they did. I don't need to talk about that."

Bernie Comment: Weak stuff from Pujols here. If he didn't want to talk about what the "front office" allegedly did to him, then why did he bring it up? Albert broached the subject. He made a vague accusation \_ indirectly taking a shot at DeWitt and Mozeliak \_ but refused to elaborate and offer specifics.

Hey, if you're going to open the door, then have the guts to walk through it. Don't try to lock that door once you've ripped it open. Too late. Can't have it both ways, Albert. Weak.

I'm also trying to figure out how the Cardinals tried to make Pujols look like a bad guy. They offered him a 10-year contract for more than \$200 million. Granted, it took them a while to get there ... but did anyone of sound mind ever think this would be an easy or simple negotiation on either side?

And granted, the Cardinals wanted to defer a significant amount of money. But so what?

First, Pujols would get the money. It's not as if DeWitt was going to stash it in a secret family account and not pay out. Pujols would get every last cent. Bottom line is, he jumped to the Angels for about an average of \$3 million per year even though it meant (A) leaving the great baseball situation he had in St. Louis (B) spending most of the baseball season away from his family; (C) doing at least some damage to his national image; (D) and getting a lot of that extra salary eaten up by higher taxes and cost of living.

But as I said at the time and will repeat again: it's Pujols' life and career and he obviously can do what he wants. Baseball is a business, and that makes him a businessman. The men who run the Cardinals are businessmen, too. They had their price; Pujols and his agent had their own price. If Albert feels the Cardinals disrespected him by offering 10 years and \$200 million plus ... well, goodness. God bless him. He's entitled to his feelings.

Second, didn't Pujols always insist that winning was the most important thing to him in baseball? How many times did we hear or read him say that? Given his firm stance on winning, why the heck would Pujols be offended by the amount of deferred dollars proposed by the Cardinals? (And he was definitely bothered by the deferred-money aspect of the deal.) Deferring money keeps the present-day payroll down, provides flexibility to address other roster needs, and puts the Cardinals in position to continue their winning ways... which is what Pujols claimed he wanted.

This is confusing.

I don't remember a single instance of anyone from the Cardinals' front office attacking Pujols personally after he left. I thought Mozeliak and DeWitt have been even-handed. The unfortunate truth is, Albert and his wife did a pretty good job of making themselves look less than good after he made his exit from the Cardinals.

Deidre went on a STL radio station to say the family was insulted when the Cardinals made an initial offer of five years for \$130 million. Really? Insulted by \$26 million per year? With so many people out of work or struggling to pay bills and feed their families? That's not exactly a genius PR move.

"Well, we got over that insult and felt like Albert had given so much of himself to baseball and into the community ... we didn't want to go through this again," Deidre said at the time.

And in spring training 2012 Pujols told USA Today he didn't care if the Cardinals handed out his No. 5 to another player. "It's just a number, so if someone else wants to wear it, that won't hurt my feelings," he said then. "Would I be shocked if St. Louis gave that number to somebody? No. They can do whatever they want. I don't play there anymore. I'm being honest; that won't bother me at all."

The point: the post-departure spin came from both sides of the contract dispute. I'm not sure what the Cardinals did that was so heinous except decline to give Pujols an Alex Rodriguez contract. Who knows where this is coming from. But Pujols and his wife have tried to make Cardinals management look bad, too.

In fact Pujols tried to do it again with the Morosi interview.

Which isn't very smart given that the Pujols Family Foundation, based in St. Louis, does such outstanding work in the community ... and it makes no sense to alienate anyone in the community here and take the risk of damaging the Pujols Family Foundation financially... the Pujols Foundation deserves support and goodwill. This doesn't help.

\* Pujols claimed he wouldn't change his decision even if he had a chance at a do-over: "Even if I could take it back, I'm happy where I am right now."

Bernie Comment: I'm going to be polite here.

I won't laugh or anything.

\* Pujols scored major PR points in St. Louis by praising Stan Musial. Apparently the Angels plan to honor the late Cardinals icon during the three-game series. And Pujols really did love Stan.

"I believe we have something going on to honor Stan," Pujols told me. "I'm still in touch with Stan's grandson... We've been friends. It's going to mean a lot. It's going to bring some memories. I still have pictures in my phone with Stan. Every time I look at my photo album, I think about him. I wish we could have had more (time together) on this Earth, but it was time for him to go. The City of St. Louis is always going to miss Stan. He was an ambassador.

"Stan was the guy who, when he walked into the clubhouse, everybody stopped doing what they were doing. It was like a light that came and shined through the whole clubhouse. That's how I felt when his presence was in the clubhouse. And it's not just Stan. It's Bob Gibson, Ozzie [Smith], Lou Brock, Bruce Sutter — all the Hall of Famers. They are really part of the organization. They come around. Red Schoendienst has like (70) years in the organization. I enjoyed having those guys around. I learned a lot from them."

Bernie comment: Pujols' affection and respect for Stan the Man is genuine. Kudos.

\* Still, when asked if he would like to be one of the Cardinal legends that come back to St. Louis to enjoy being a big part of the esteemed baseball heritage here, Pujols wouldn't say.

Check that: at first Pujols all but dismissed the idea.

"I'll be here in Anaheim," Pujols told Morosi in an apparent reference to his 10-year personal services contract (after retiring as a player) to Angels owner Arte Moreno.

Then Pujols \_ undoubtedly realizing the wisdom of softening his stance \_ didn't rule out a reconciliation.

"I don't know," Pujols told Morosi. "I can't tell you what's going to happen. If we're alive by then, we can talk about it. It'll be a different conversation. I don't want to talk about that right now."

Bernie Comment: Pujols is in a tough spot here. The Angels are paying him a lot of loot and will be for eight more years after this one. The investment won't end well. His production is down. The team is a disappointment. The Angels don't create a buzz in SoCal. Moreno has wasted a spectacular amount of money on bad contracts. Pujols and family choose to live in St. Louis, not Anaheim. But Pujols can't go on and on about missing St. Louis, or wanting to be part of the Cardinals' organization again one day. Not after Moreno made such a huge commitment to him. It would cause Pujols more headaches in Anaheim. He has to present loyalty to the Angels, and play it cool here, and I understand that.

All in all, Pujols did a pretty good job with this interview. Yapping about the STL front office but refusing to explain the reason for his resentment didn't make Pujols look good, and as a general principle, Pujols would do well to exercise diplomacy.

That isn't Pujols, however. Albert doesn't always help himself. Rage will always be a part of this machine; it's a big reason why Pujols has been one of the great hitters in MLB history.

The same stubborn pride that caused Pujols to make such an impulsive decision to jump to the Angels still roils inside of him.

Thanks for reading...

-Bernie

## **Mujica on track to join Cards' great relievers**

9 HOURS AGO • BY RICK HUMMEL RHUMMEL@POST-DISPATCH.COM 314-340-8196

The list of Cardinals closers with 30 or more saves in a season is an estimable one and as lengthy as any team's in the majors. Since 1982 eight Cardinals relievers have combined for 30 or more saves in a season, starting with Bruce Sutter, who had 36 saves at age 29 in 1982 and continuing through Jason Motte, who had 42 at age 30 last year.

The newest member of this club should be Edward Mujica, who, like Sutter and Motte, is making his first real mark as a Cardinal at age 29.

While Mujica may not have the 40-plus seasons that Lee Smith, Jason Isringhausen, Sutter and Motte had with the Cardinals, his efficiency rate is higher. In fact, it couldn't be any higher than it is now at 100 percent on 21 for 21 this season as the Cardinals prepare for the start of a series tonight in Oakland.

"We couldn't ask him to do anything more," said manager Mike Matheny.

Mujica, one save from Tom Henke's 22 straight at the start of the 1995 season when he finished 36 of 38 and then retired, was given the closer's job in mid-April when Mitchell Boggs floundered.

"I love it," said Mujica. "It's crazy because I wasn't even thinking about that for this year."

Mujica had been told by Matheny in the spring that he would be used mostly in the seventh inning. But, then during a series in Pittsburgh in April, Matheny told Mujica he was going to have some ninth-inning work.

"I was just thinking it was going to be for one night," said Mujica. And, perhaps, it almost was. Mujica nearly blew his first save before he had one in Philadelphia.

Mujica actually entered the game in the eighth inning with two on and two out and fanned pinch hitter Laynce Nix. Then, in the ninth, still protecting a one-run lead, he allowed back-to-back singles.

"I was a little nervous," Mujica said. "First and third. No outs. Oh, my God."

"I just took a deep breath. Two, three seconds. And I said to myself, 'Let's start working.'"

Mujica pitched out of the spot, without the ball leaving the infield.

But, ultimately, there will be mortality. There will be blown saves, perhaps a couple in a row, and observers will wonder how a pitcher responds to failure.

"You have to be the same person," said Mujica. "When you're doing bad, sometimes you start doing stuff that you never did before."

Cardinals lefthander Randy Choate, a teammate of Mujica's with Florida/Miami also, said he didn't envision Mujica having to deal with failure at all this year. "But I've seen him get pretty upset," said Choate.

One case in point was when Mujica, mopping up, allowed a run in the ninth inning on Tuesday in Houston when the Cardinals led, 13-4, and berated himself afterward.

"He's a perfectionist," said Matheny. "You hate to give up a run as any pitcher in any inning."

But Choate said, "The next day, he's the old Mujica, yelling across the clubhouse and making fun of people.

Everybody loves it when he does that." With success comes confidence, Choate said. "He's just really found his niche here."

"He knows his role. When he was in Miami, he was doing a little bit of everything. He'll tell you he's not superstitious, but if he's not, he's got this really rigorous routine, from when he stretches and things he does during the game. It's the same every game."

Catcher Yadier Molina likes routine, too. He will call for Mujica's signature changeup time and time again, perhaps as many as 25 in a row. "If it ain't broke, then don't fix it," said Choate.

An unseen element in Mujica's future with the Cardinals is that he can be a free agent at the end of the season. His \$3.2 million salary can double or triple as a successful closer. He could be that here but the Cardinals already have a closer they are paying in Motte, out for this year after elbow surgery but who is expected back next year.

"I like this team," said Mujica. "I don't even know about free agency. I just want to win this year. I don't care about next year."

Often it is said, mostly by those who have never done it, that the ninth inning is the same as the seventh or the eighth. It isn't, said Mujica.

"It's totally different being a setup man and being a closer," he said.

"In the seventh, if you give it up, you know you've got an offense behind you and they can tie the game or go ahead. In the ninth inning, on the road, you don't have anybody behind you.

"It's fun to get the last three outs and get the wins for the team."

And, when that happens, Mujica goes through an elaborate ritual of Ninja sword-fighting move, a flat-line "B level" move that Mujica said stems from teammate Carlos Beltran's even-keel approach and the flashing of "Cardinal birds (on the bat)" with two of his fingers.

To all his Cardinals teammates except Choate, who calls him "Mookie," Mujica is "the Chief." This originated two years ago when veteran manager Jack McKeon was finishing out the season with the Marlins.

McKeon had trouble with Mujica's name.

"He said to me one day, 'I can't say your name? Are you American Indian?'"

"I said, 'No, I'm from Venezuela,'" said Mujica.

"He said, 'It's better for me to call you 'the Chief,' You're the last of the Mohicans.'"

Mujica said, "That was crazy. But I said, 'OK.' And everybody started me calling me 'the Chief.'"

"I was surprised last year when I got traded when Mo (Cardinals general manager John Mozeliak) called me and said, 'Chief, how are you doing?'"

"I said, 'What? How did you know that?'"

Now everybody knows. And they also know that Mujica's pitching has been worthy of the title.

## Cardinals vs. Athletics series preview

9 HOURS AGO • BY RICK HUMMEL RHUMMEL@POST-DISPATCH.COM 314-340-8196

Scouting report: The Cardinals are making only their second regular-season visit to Oakland, where they won two of three interleague games in 2007. Overall, they are 7-2 against the A's. ... Ageless Bartolo Colon, 40, who will face the Cardinals tonight, is the majors' hottest pitcher. Colon has a 7-0 mark and 1.41 earned run average in his last seven starts. ... Third baseman Josh Donaldson is one of the A's most productive bats, especially in interleague play. Donaldson is 15 for 35 (.429) against the NL this year with three homers and 10 runs batted in. For the season, he has 12 homers and 40 RBIs. ... Leadoff man Coco Crisp, originally a Cardinals farmhand, has nine homers this season, three of them leading off games. Crisp was dealt to Cleveland in the Chuck Finley trade in 2002. ... The A's have won 15 of their 16 last home games and are 7-2 this season in interleague play. ... The two most efficient closers in baseball will be on display. Oakland's Grant Balfour has saved 18 straight this year and 36 in a row over two seasons. The Cardinals' Edward Mujica is 21 for 21 this year.

Pitching matchups (St. Louis times):

Today, 9:05 p.m.: RH Shelby Miller (8-5, 2.35 ERA) vs. RH Bartolo Colon (10-2, 2.93).

Saturday, 3:05 p.m.: RH Adam Wainwright (10-5, 2.31) vs. RH Jarrod Parker (6-6, 4.27).

Sunday, 3:05 p.m.: RH Jake Westbrook (4-2, 2.21) vs. LH Tommy Milone (6-7, 4.06).

Rick Hummel

## Preview: Cards look to overcome recent funk in week's second interleague series

ASSOCIATED PRESS | Published: Friday, June 28, 2013, 8:00am

The Oakland Athletics have lost a share of the AL West lead, but they're starting to head in the right direction. Another start by Bartolo Colon could help them stay on that path.

Colon could become the A's first pitcher in eight seasons to win eight consecutive starts Friday night when Oakland opens a three-game set with the visiting St. Louis Cardinals.

With Texas beating the Yankees 2-0 on Thursday, Oakland (46-34) fell one-half game behind the Rangers in the West.

The A's held a two-game division lead two weeks ago, but a 5-7 stretch has them playing catch-up. Oakland, though, is off to an encouraging start to an eight-game homestand after a two-game sweep of Cincinnati.

Manager Bob Melvin's club improved to 7-2 against NL teams with Wednesday's 5-0 victory.

The A's now turn to Colon (10-2, 2.93 ERA), who at 40 is enjoying the best stretch of his 16-year career. The right-hander has won seven consecutive starts for the first time, a period in which he's posted a 1.41 ERA.

The worst of those was his latest, but he was still good enough. Colon yielded a three-run homer and six other hits over eight innings of a 6-3 victory at Seattle last Friday.

He said through a translator that he's doing a better job mixing in offspeed stuff with his fastball, which he throws 85.1 percent of the time.

"He's a veteran guy. He knows himself. He knows what works," said center fielder Coco Crisp, who should return after missing Wednesday's game due to a family matter. "It's not a fluke."

No A's pitcher has won eight consecutive starts since Barry Zito in 2005.

Colon hasn't faced the Cardinals since 2007 while with the Angels. He'll likely be throwing to John Jaso, who should return after missing the last five games because of a hand injury.

St. Louis (48-30), meanwhile, arrives at the Coliseum for the first time since taking two of three there from June 15-17, 2007.

The Cardinals are tied with Pittsburgh atop the NL Central after losing for the fourth time in five games Wednesday, 4-3 at Houston.

They'll continue their eight-game trip with Shelby Miller (8-5, 2.35) on the hill. The right-hander leads all rookies in wins and strikeouts (101), but he's been tagged for two homers in two of his past three outings, including a 4-2 loss to Texas on Saturday when he surrendered four runs in 5 2/3 innings.

Yadier Molina should be behind the plate after making his second career start at first base Wednesday. Molina, the NL batting leader at .357, is 2 for 4 in each of the past two games after going 1 for 12 in the previous three.

"He's just got a real good approach and doesn't alter from it when things aren't going how he wants," Cardinals

second baseman Matt Carpenter told the team's official website.

A's slugger Yoenis Cespedes is not performing up to his standards - batting .163 in 12 games since missing two with hamstring tightness - but Melvin doesn't seem too concerned.

"I think it's more of a mental thing," he told the A's official website. "He's not, maybe, 100 percent running down the line. It takes a little time."

Oakland's Josh Donaldson and St. Louis' Allen Craig can both homer in three straight games. Donaldson has done that once before, while Craig has yet to accomplished the feat.

## **Naming of new I-70 bridge after Musial wins favor in Congress**

FS MIDWEST STAFF | Published: Thursday, June 27, 2013, 7:06pm

Legislation naming the new I-70 bridge over the Mississippi River in St. Louis the Stan Musial Veterans Memorial Bridge unanimously passed the U.S. Senate on Thursday, and is expected to be quickly signed into law by President Barack Obama.

"As Jack Buck would say, 'That's a winner,'" said U.S. Senator Claire McCaskill, who introduced the legislation earlier this year. "It's a good day for St. Louis, Cardinal Nation and the Musial family -- and I'm thrilled the Stan Span will soon be a reality."

In a statement released Thursday, Musial's children -- Dick Musial, Gerry Ashley, Janet Schwarze and Jean Edmonds -- said they were very grateful the new bridge would be named after their father, who played 22 seasons for the Cardinals and died in January.

"Our father would be particularly proud to be forever linked to the many men and women who have bravely and selflessly served our nation," the family's statement read.

In 2010, a bi-state Congressional delegation encouraged Obama to consider Musial for the Presidential Medal of Freedom -- an honor he received on Feb. 15, 2011.

The Presidential Medal of Freedom recognizes those who have made an "especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of the United States, world peace, cultural or other significant public or private endeavors." The award was first given by President Harry S. Truman in 1945 to honor civilian service and was revived in 1963 by President John F. Kennedy.

## **McNeal: Cardinals coming back to earth after red-hot start**

STAN McNEAL | Published: Thursday, June 27, 2013, 4:47pm

ST. LOUIS -- For a team coming off a 13-run outburst at Houston on Tuesday, the Cardinals looked more like a team heading for a slump on Wednesday.

The eighth inning was particularly troubling. After Carlos Beltran drew a one-out walk with St. Louis down 4-3, Allen Craig and Matt Holliday both struck out against Astros rookie Jose Cisnero.

When Craig took strike three, he stood at the plate almost like he was dazed. He could not have been stunned by the call because the pitch clearly was a strike. Holliday then worked the count full before he swung and missed an up-and-in fastball that looked like ball four. Beltran was stranded and an inning later, the Cardinals had lost for the seventh time in 12 games.

In the losses, the Cardinals have scored 4, 2, 2, 4, 2, 1 and 3 runs. They no longer own sole possession of the majors' best record. The surging Pirates have tied the Cardinals in the standings and passed them for the majors lead in team ERA.

So, what's the deal? Are the Cardinals not as good as we thought?

I don't know if they are a 100-win team, which they are on pace to be. But I know this: Baseball isn't as easy over a 162-game season as the Cardinals have made it look through 78 games. It's just not.

Teams don't hit .337 with runners in scoring position for an entire season. Teams don't use 10 rookie pitchers without seeing more downs than ups. Teams don't often anoint a new closer during the season and watch him convert his first 20 save chances.

But even if the Cardinals are settling into their level, they will be fine. To finish with 90 wins, which should be enough to make the playoffs, they need to play .500 from here on. While they might not be strong enough to win 100 games, they're certainly better than .500.

Yadier Molina's notable number of the week: 96 hits as a catcher. That's 24 more hits than any other catcher this season, a pretty astounding margin.

Molina will enter this weekend's series at Oakland on a pace to finish with 199 hits as a catcher, which would break Ivan Rodriguez's single-season record of 198, set in 1999.

Molina is unlikely to keep up such a pace with the summer just turning steamy. For one reason, he figures to get much more time off. A favorable schedule, however, should get Molina to the All-Star break with perhaps only one more day off.

The Cardinals spend the next week on the West Coast, where mild weather doesn't add to the catching grind. They have another day off between the Marlins and Astros series at home, then will finish the first half with four games at Wrigley Field.

Molina is likely to get a day off at home next weekend and -- maybe -- a day in Chicago but I would not expect him to sit any out more than that until the break.

McClellan knew he was a goner: When Kyle McClellan's season ended last June with shoulder surgery, he knew his days with his hometown team were history. He hadn't seen many of the organization's young arms in spring training but he had heard about them.

"I knew they had them coming," McClellan said when in town last weekend with his new team, the Rangers. "That's why when I had surgery last year and was asked, what do you think's going to happen, I said they're going to let me go."

McClellan said the club questioned him for saying something like that. But he had his reason.

"Do you know what they have behind me," he said. "If you don't, you're about to find out."

He was right, about his departure and the young arms that have arrived.

Remember these dates: Aug. 13-Sept. 8. The Cardinals have 26 games scheduled during that stretch, and nine are against the Pirates. In addition, the teams will meet for a five-game series in Pittsburgh at the end of July. The Pirates lead the season series 3-2, so far.

## Oakland Athletics Must Quiet St. Louis Cardinals' Bats

By Matt Verderame | Yahoo! Contributor Network – 32 minutes ago

COMMENTARY | After staggering home from a road trip that saw series losses to the Texas Rangers and Seattle Mariners, the Oakland Athletics (46-34) showed why they are a championship contender.

Facing Joey Votto, Jay Bruce and the rest of the vaunted Cincinnati Reds, Oakland swept the two games from the Queen City boys. The A's showcased a team effort, pounding Bronson Arroyo for seven runs in the first three innings of the opener while the recently disastrous bullpen picked up Tommy Milone.

The bullpen, which had allowed eight runs in seven frames during the last two contests in Seattle, threw 4.1 scoreless innings, giving the A's a 7-3 triumph. In the last affair it was A.J. Griffin throwing the best game of his career, spinning a two-hit shutout for a 5-0 win.

Josh Donaldson also put on his big-boy pants, hitting two homers in the series.

Now, Oakland welcomes the St. Louis Cardinals (48-30) to the O.co Coliseum for a three-game set.

Pitching matchups

Shelby Miller (8-5, 2.35) vs. Bartolo Colon (10-2, 2.93)

In a battle of young vs. old, Colon and Miller kick off this marquee series. Colon comes in as one of the biggest surprises in baseball, a strong candidate for the All-Star team. The 40-year-old has been remarkably consistent even with his unique frame, allowing more than three earned runs only twice in a start, and not once since May 9. Miller has struggled of late, giving up four earned runs in two of his last three outings. The right-hander is one of the best youngsters in the game and looks to bounce back against a team filled with players he's never faced before, sans one at-bat versus Jed Lowrie.

Adam Wainwright (10-5, 2.31) vs. Jarrod Parker (6-6, 4.27)

Parker scuffled in his last outing, surrendering two homers to the ancient yet still good Raul Ibanez, ultimately earning a no-decision in seven innings of three-run work. Parker has had issues with the long ball, giving up 15 this season after watching only 11 balls leave the park in 2012. Recently, though, Parker has realized being good is more fun than the alternative, with a 3-0 mark in June and a 2.29 ERA.

Wainwright is currently one of the top candidates for the NL Cy Young Award. The Georgia-native has walked a mere 10 batters for the year while punching out 106 and possesses an insanely good WHIP of 1.01. However, Wainwright has lost his last two outings against the Rangers and Chicago Cubs, respectively.

Tommy Milone (6-7, 4.06) vs. Jake Westbrook (4-2, 2.21)

Milone failed to earn the win in his last appearance against Cincinnati despite Oakland giving him seven runs. The southpaw only pitched 4.2 innings thanks to six hits, four walks and three runs. Milone has been roughed up in his two latest starts, allowing a total of nine earned runs in 10 innings while walking five and striking out three.

Westbrook is the typical Cardinals find. Old, used up, and somehow effective a la Jeff Suppan and Woody Williams. The ex-Indians standout has been vulnerable in recent times, though, getting tagged for four runs against the Houston Astros on June 25 and hit for three runs in five innings against the hapless Miami Marlins three starts ago. Trouble or a blip on the radar?

Hitters to watch

Josh Donaldson has been red-hot the past six games, hitting .364, driving in six runs and hitting an aforementioned pair of blasts against Cincinnati. Lowrie has also been on fire with hits in 12 of his last 25 at-bats. Coco Crisp might wear the hero hat in the finale, as he wears out Westbrook with an 8-for-15 stat line against him.

No team has a more balanced offense than St. Louis, evidenced by eight regulars hitting at or above .293 in June. These streakers are led by Yadier Molina, who is reaching base at a .415 clip in that span. Keep an eye on Carlos Beltran, who pounds Colon to the tune of four homers and a .317 average in 41 at-bats.

Final thought

The Cardinals have been struggling for the first time this season, entering Oakland as losers in four of their previous five. With stats such as being second in runs scored (388), third in team ERA (3.25) and tops in run differential (+113), don't expect a prolonged slump from the Redbirds.

Oakland is simply looking to keep the positive vibes going against the NL Central. So far, the A's are 4-1 against the division and face the Chicago Cubs after St. Louis leaves town. With Texas playing the Reds over the weekend, Oakland is eyeing a return to first place.