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**Garza's complete game for naught after early runs
A's use small ball as Parker, bullpen keep Rangers' bats quiet
By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com | 8/3/2013 8:52 PM ET**

OAKLAND -- Rangers starter Matt Garza pitched his first complete game in his last 33 starts Saturday afternoon. It was also just the second complete game by a Rangers pitcher this season.

But Garza also gave up first-inning runs for the first time this season and his complete game came in a losing effort. The A's scored three runs in the first and held on for a 4-2 victory against the Rangers at O.co Coliseum.

"They had a big first inning," said Garza, who lost for the first time since June 11. "It's always tough to put your guys in a hole like that. I was able to keep the bullpen down, get deep in the game and give guys a rest, but I didn't do my job."

Jarrod Parker and three Oakland relievers did, holding the Rangers to two runs on seven hits. They also combined to retire 14 of the last 15 hitters they faced. The Rangers had some chances early, but went 1-for-8 with runners in scoring position.

"We didn't expect to win every game the rest of the year," outfielder David Murphy said. "We played well today and both pitchers threw well, but they did a good job of getting an early lead."

The loss snapped the Rangers' five-game winning streak, while the Athletics brought a three-game losing streak to an end -- their longest since a five-game skid in early May. The A's again have a 3 1/2 game lead in the American League West with the third and final game of the series scheduled for Sunday afternoon.

"Any time we're playing somebody within the division, we know we need to win those games, and obviously they're right behind us and we know we need to put together nine complete innings," Parker said after earning his first victory since beating the Rangers on June 18. "And if it takes more than that, it's going to take more than that. I think for us to come out and set the tone early and score some runs and just be upbeat, I think that's a big thing for us right now. "

The Rangers had a chance to take the lead in the first after Leonys Martin led off with a double. Elvis Andrus followed and struck out after fouling off a 1-1 bunt attempt to move the runner over. Parker then got Ian Kinsler on a one-hop smash to shortstop Eric Sogard and struck out Adrian Beltre to end the inning.

"We had some chances, but you can't cash them all in," manager Ron Washington said.

The Athletics did what the Rangers couldn't do in the first inning. They got the bunts down and the hit with runners in scoring position. They also got the long ball.

Coco Crisp led off with a perfectly placed bunt up the third-base line and beat it out for a hit. Sogard moved him to second with a sacrifice bunt.

"That showed me they're going to play small ball against me," Garza said. "The next time I'll be ready."

"It worked out, obviously," Sogard said. "I think it's kind of no secret Garza has some trouble throwing to first sometimes, so we wanted to try to take advantage of that. Coco laid down a perfect bunt, then I came up and put it where I wanted to, got the job done, and we ended up scoring three runs."

Jed Lowrie brought the first run home by slicing a shallow fly into left for a single. Yoenis Cespedes then crushed a 1-0 slider over the left-center field wall for a two-run home run.

"Garza threw it down, but that's his zone," Washington said. "If you throw it down there but don't get it into the dirt, that's what Cespedes can do. He's pretty strong."

The Rangers got one in the third after Parker walked Martin and Andrus with one out. He struck out Kinsler, but Beltre fisted a soft line drive down the right-field line for a run-scoring single. Kinsler made it 3-2 with his 10th home run of the season with one out in the fifth, but the Rangers managed just one single the rest of the afternoon.

The A's scratched out one more run off of Garza in the seventh. Garza started the inning by walking Alberto Callaspo, his only walk on the afternoon. Stephen Vogt bunted him to second, and Crisp lined a single to right, putting runners on the corners. That brought up Sogard, who dropped another bunt down the first-base line. Garza fielded it and had no chance at Callaspo at home plate. The sacrifice bunt made it 4-2.

Injured Cruz exits Rangers' loss early

By T.R. Sullivan and Cash Kruth / MLB.com | 8/3/2013 10:45 P.M. ET

Rangers outfielder Nelson Cruz left Saturday's 4-2 loss to the A's with an injury he sustained while running out a ground ball in the eighth inning.

The injury may have been related to a bruised left quad Cruz has been dealing with since Tuesday, when he was forced to leave a 14-11 win over the Angels. Cruz appeared to be limping on Saturday after making a running catch in the fifth inning.

The 33-year-old All-Star entered Saturday hitting .272 with 26 home runs, 75 RBIs and an .845 on-base plus slugging percentage.

Cruz is one of about 10 players expected to be suspended by Major League Baseball on Monday for alleged involvement with the Biogenesis, a South Florida clinic that allegedly distributed performance-enhancing substances to certain players.

"I have no control over that; I'm here to play baseball," Cruz said on Tuesday of MLB's investigation.

Pitchers Kirkman, Feliz begin rehab assignments

OAKLAND --- Left-handed pitcher Michael Kirkman, sidelined for two months while undergoing treatment for skin cancer, and right-hander Neftali Feliz are emerging again as late-season options for the Rangers.

Kirkman began a rehab assignment for Triple-A Round Rock on Friday, allowing two runs on seven hits in five innings against Fresno. He walked two, struck out two and threw 72 pitches in a 3-1 loss.

"We were encouraged by the outing last night," assistant general manager Thad Levine said. "The velocity was 90-94 and the reports read like somebody who was in the first time back in a game, so there was some rustiness. But he worked through that on the mound and was competitive."

Feliz, who had Tommy John elbow reconstruction surgery on Aug. 1, 2012, pitched one scoreless inning for the Arizona Rookie League Rangers on Friday against the Brewers' affiliate. He did not allow a hit, walked one and struck out two in his first game action since the surgery.

The Rangers are bringing back Feliz as a reliever. He was their closer from 2010-11 before being moved to the rotation last season. He should be ready to rejoin the Rangers' bullpen by September at the latest.

"He's going to go on a rehab as a reliever," Levine said. "So he'll be going in one-inning stints. There's an ability, if we wanted to, to fast-track that, but we're also not rushing that, considering the injury he came back from. But we do hope and expect to have him make an impact in the big leagues this year."

The Rangers are keeping their options open with Kirkman. He has started games in the Minors in the past, but made the team out of Spring Training as a reliever. Right now, the Rangers see benefits of using him as a starter at Round Rock.

"I think the initial start was to give him time on the mound, iron out some things, but I think we also viewed it as why not stretch him out as a starter," Levine said. "It gives him an opportunity to come back either as a starter, long man or a short man out of the 'pen, rather than building him up as a short man and then you really only have one alternative how you could use him."

Andrus boasts hit streak, but lacks extra-base hits

OAKLAND -- Shortstop Elvis Andrus, after struggling for much of the first half, extended his hit streak to 16 games in Saturday's 4-2 loss to the A's. It's the longest streak by a Rangers player this season and ties his career high. Andrus went 1-for-3 to bring his average to .339 (20-for-59) during the streak, raising his season average to .257.

"It's about time," Andrus said. "For me, I've been fighting so much with my swing and my approach in the first half. I came into the second half with a plan and I've executed it. That's what I was looking for.

"Before I was trying to do so many things, now I've tried to simplify it. See a lot of pitches, hit the ball middle-away [center and right field] and don't pull too much. I just got lost in the first half."

Of his 20 hits during the streak, four were doubles, giving him 12 on the season. He has not hit a home run this season and has just three triples, none during his recent surge. He tripled nine times in 2012, but his last was on May 18. The other two came in the second game of the season.

His .297 slugging percentage entering Saturday's play was the second lowest in the American League and would be the sixth lowest among qualifying hitters in Rangers history. The lowest was .255 by Jim Sundberg in 1975.

"Elvis is not a power hitter and I certainly hope he doesn't get to the point where he thinks like that," manager Ron Washington said. "When you struggle like he's struggled, it's hard to get doubles and triples. It's just one of those years where things haven't fallen into place for him. But he hasn't stopped grinding. We still have two months to go. He's got time to add to the doubles and triples. It's not over yet."

Ogando, Ross try to sort out command issues

OAKLAND -- The Rangers led, 6-3, after five innings Friday night. But they needed three pitchers to get to that point, and Jason Frasor saved everybody by getting the Rangers out of a bases-loaded jam in the fifth. Starter Alexi Ogando and reliever Robbie Ross both had their issues.

Ogando, in his third start since coming off the disabled list, made it through just four innings. He allowed three runs on four hits and five walks while striking out one. He threw 92 pitches, 48 for strikes. Ogando has pitched 13 2/3 innings since his return, walking seven compared to four strikeouts.

"He's not hurt, so it's a matter of getting his command back," manager Ron Washington said. "He gets his command back, that will take care of everything. He's searching for his command. He has always been a strike-thrower. If he gets his command, the strikeouts will take care of itself."

Ross faced five batters in the fifth and allowed three to reach base on two singles and a walk. He did not complete the inning, turning it over to Frasor.

Ross is 2-2 with a 5.48 ERA since June 1, while opponents are hitting .287 off him. He averages 1.57 walks and hits per inning pitched. Over the first two months of the season, Ross was 2-0 with a 0.37 ERA, .231 opponents batting average and a 1.11 WHIP.

During that stretch, left-handed hitters had just seven singles in 31 at-bats. Since June 1, they are 16-for-38, including six doubles and three home runs.

"He's not hitting his spots," Washington said. "Robbie is at his best when he is commanding the baseball and hitting his spots. He's got to hone in on his command and execute his pitches. When he does that, we'll get the Robbie Ross that we know."

Manny remains content with Rangers at Triple-A

OAKLAND -- Manny Ramirez went 2-for-3 for Triple-A Round Rock on Friday night against Fresno. He is now hitting .280 in 22 games with a .415 slugging percentage. Even with the possibility of Nelson Cruz being suspended Monday, the Rangers still aren't inclined to bring Ramirez to the big leagues.

But they are also willing to stick with Ramirez rather than let him go. Ramirez also appears content to keep playing at Round Rock and hasn't pressed the Rangers for a promotion.

"You know, he's been terrific in that regard," assistant general manager Thad Levine said. "He's down there playing. We're not having daily, weekly conversations with either he or his agent about what is the end. I think they understand that if his performance demands a promotion, it's going to happen. If not, he understands the onus is on him to prove his worth to the big league team."

The Rangers would also likely not stand in the way if another team feels Ramirez could help it. But nobody has made that call.

"Not to my knowledge," Levine said. "I think the understanding with somebody of that caliber and stature, if that call was made, we would ask for a 24- to 72-hour window to assess our situation at the big leagues here, and if we didn't feel we had a direct path, we would certainly facilitate a path for him to get to the big leagues with another team."

Worth noting

- The Rangers won Friday night for the first time this season without drawing a walk offensively.
- Jurickson Profar hit a home run Friday night while batting ninth and being used at designated hitter. It's only the third time in club history that the designated hitter has hit a home run from the ninth spot in the order. Dave Hostetler did it in 1983 and Taylor Teagarden in 2008.
- Friday night was also the fifth time this season the Rangers have won even though their starter pitched four innings or fewer.

Lewis confident he's ready to return to Rangers Rightly awaits word after throwing five innings, 86 pitches in latest rehab start By Master Tesfatsion / MLB.com | 8/3/2013 11:27 P.M. ET

FRISCO, Texas -- Colby Lewis feels he's ready to be activated by the Rangers after making his seventh rehab start on Saturday.

The decision now rests in the club's hands after the right-hander pitched five innings for Double-A Frisco, allowing two runs on six hits. He threw 59 of his 86 pitches for strikes, collecting three punchouts, all swinging, and one walk against Double-A San Antonio.

"It's up to them," Lewis said. "A couple weeks ago, I felt like I could've slid right in, but I feel like now we got five guys [in the rotation] that are kind of locking it down. They've got a decision to make, so we'll see what happens."

Lewis' fastball averaged around 88 mph, which was his average last season before he tore his flexor tendon in his right elbow last July and missed the remainder of the season. Lewis has had two setbacks dealing with triceps tendinitis and muscular soreness since the injury.

The right-hander allowed a solo shot to center field to the second batter he faced on an 88-mph fastball. Lewis hit 90 mph three times in his outing, twice on the at-bat following the home run and picked up his second strikeout in the inning on an 83-mph slider.

"I felt like my misses were all in the same area," Lewis said of his fastball. "I felt like when I did miss, it was in the location where I wanted it to be. Other than that, I felt like I commanded the ball pretty good, threw some good changeups. My curveball was hit and miss, but usually if you have three out of the four, it's going to be a pretty decent day."

Lewis threw 24 pitches in the third, working around a one-out triple to the second batter. He forced the next two batters to ground out in the infield, mixing in more offspeed pitches.

"You try to attack them with fastballs, and they just jump all over it," Lewis said. "With runners in scoring position, I tried to start guys off soft and keep them from hunting that fastball."

Lewis allowed his second run in the fifth allowing a one-out double and single in consecutive at-bats on three pitches. He then issued a seven-pitch walk, but ended his outing on a popout and flyout.

In his third rehab stint, Lewis has a 7.10 ERA in his last four starts. He's allowed five runs in 10 innings during his last two outings.

"Overall I felt like my stamina definitely gets better every time I go out," Lewis said. "Eighty-six pitches, I feel like I definitely could've gone out for another one. Overall, it felt like another good outing."

Rangers, A's meet for final time before September
Holland tries to continue road success as Griffin protects AL West lead
By John Schlegel / MLB.com | 8/3/2013 8:22 PM ET

The A's stemmed the tide of the Rangers' sudden surge in the American League West, taking a game Saturday to extend their division lead. Come Sunday, the two teams' final meeting until September is on tap.

The Rangers had gone 28 days without gaining any ground on the A's before picking up 3 1/2 games in four days, and now the A's enter Sunday's finale with the margin back up to 3 1/2 games in the AL West standings.

With A.J. Griffin making the start for the A's, it'll be Derek Holland on the mound for the Rangers, after what would be their biggest road series victory thus far. The Texas left-hander says it's not too early to elevate the game's importance to stretch-run levels.

"They are all big games from here on out," Holland said. "We're chasing Oakland. Obviously every game counts, but these are big games. It's a chance to gain ground, a turning point, and take off from there."

Holland enters Sunday's game with a sharp 6-1 record and a 2.89 ERA on the road.

"You have to perform, whether it's home or on the road. I just have to go out and match the other pitcher, and do everything to give my team a chance to win and gain ground," Holland said.

Griffin will try to do the same as he makes his first August start following a July in which he went 4-1 with a 4.86 ERA and a .252 opponents' batting average in six starts, allowing eight homers over his last three starts for a Majors-leading 26 on the season.

"It's pretty frustrating, but today was a little different story," Griffin explained after the slugging Blue Jays took him deep three times Monday. "I had a [seven]-run lead. I was trying to get ahead of guys and get us back to the dugout as quick as possible."

Griffin has been sharp in two outings against the Rangers this season, posting a 2.19 ERA in 12 1/3 innings of work against them.

While some might consider this one of the early pivotal games as baseball heads toward the stretch run, as Holland does, Rangers manager Ron Washington has a different perspective.

"I want to take over first place on Sept. 30," Washington said. "But if you start to think about things like that, you miss what's going on in the present. First place will take care of itself by playing good baseball, not thinking about taking first place and trying to win a ballgame today."

Rangers: Andrus keeps on rolling

Shortstop Elvis Andrus extended his hitting streak to a career-high-tying 16 games Saturday, matching his streak from Aug. 28-Sept. 14, 2009. It's also the longest active streak in the Majors, and the longest streak for a Rangers hitter this season.

- Washington said the A's have an advantage over the Rangers because of the weather.

"I was here for 11 years. The weather here is refreshing," Washington said Saturday. "I'd like to see them play in 100-degree heat and 90 percent humidity for two months. All you have to worry about here is blue skies and the sun in your face. It's great. The weather here refreshes you and energizes you."

Athletics: Callaspo starts at second

Alberto Callaspo, acquired from the Angels earlier this week, made his first start for the A's on Saturday, playing the entire game at second base. He said when he was acquired he hadn't played second in longer than he could remember, but A's manager Bob Melvin remembered Callaspo as a fit at second from their days together in Arizona.

"Now there is some uncertainty, obviously, because he hasn't played there in a couple years, but he's always been a sure-handed defender," Melvin said.

Callaspo had a clean game at second with Eric Sogard shifting over to shortstop. Jed Lowrie still batted third, as the designated hitter. Callaspo went 0-for-2 with a run scored, while Sogard delivered a perfect safety squeeze for an insurance run late in the game and added a single, extending a career-high hitting streak to 11 games.

Worth noting

- The Rangers still lead the season series, 7-5, despite Saturday's loss. After Sunday's finale, the two teams will meet twice in the season's finale month, first Sept. 2-4 at Oakland and then Sept. 13-15 at Arlington.

- The A's will have two days off in the next four, traveling Monday to Cincinnati for a two-game set with the Reds that begins Tuesday, then traveling to Toronto on Thursday for a three-game set that starts Friday. The Rangers continue an AL West trip with a three-game set at the Angels before heading to Houston on Thursday to begin a three-game set Friday.

FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

Rangers owners should leave Ron Washington alone

Posted Saturday, Aug. 03, 2013

By Randy Galloway

As the local chapter chairman of the "Leave Ron Washington Alone" fraternity, I was watching with interest — watching even from some faraway vacation locales — as my man and his baseball team had a rocky, ruddy month of July.

From a public standpoint, and also from certain elements within the Texas Rangers' organization, the blame for all this fell on familiar shoulders.

When anything goes wrong in Arlington, it all comes out in the Wash.

At the lowest point in late July, even Brother Engel in this newspaper was wondering in print if the blame game directed at the manager could eventually lead to a firing at the end of the season.

What followed, however, was a run of Rangers wins last week at the ballpark, and it was all better for the time being, but, of course, there will be another crisis, and, as usual, it will all come out in the Wash again.

Meanwhile, I'm here to tell you that regardless of how this season ends, Ron Washington will not be fired. Actually, based on overall developments with the Rangers since April, the case can be made he deserves a contract extension with a fat raise attached.

No manager in the game has done a better job of managing a negative situation. That doesn't make Washington the best manager, but there's a short list among the 30 in MLB who have done an equal job of crisis management.

And if we include the big-picture hierarchy chart for the Rangers, Washington has certainly far outperformed the team's ownership, the team's newly minted president of baseball operations and the team's newly minted, but already departed, president of baseball business.

But here's the main reason that no matter what, Washington won't be fired:

The owners aren't that stupid. Or maybe it's more like the owners learned a good baseball lesson after being real stupid last November. Bob? Ray? I'm assuming, right, that you did learn?

After the 2012 season, the rich guys decided to stir around in corporate crap. The decision came down to fix what wasn't broke.

Nolan Ryan being in charge wasn't that important anymore.

So Jon Daniels went from general manager to president of baseball operations. Jon became the big baseball cheese.

Rick George went from some executive title to president of baseball business. Rick became the business department big cheese.

Nolan, obviously with wounded pride, became simply a detached observer.

My, how things have changed in a mere seven months.

It's funny how, once July went badly for the team on the field, everybody at the ballpark, including the owners, now want to be Nolan's new best friend.

Daniels, meanwhile, finally broke out of a prolonged slump by making the Matt Garza trade — an excellent move — and it was a deal that came just when you had to wonder if Jon still had a baseball pulse.

He had the new title of baseball god, but he had no trigger finger. And he still hasn't given Washington that long-awaited bat, but at least Daniels, with the Garza deal, came out of a funk that started at the winter meetings in December.

When the deep slump hit, the blame went to Washington. That's point-blank wrong. The blame goes to a do-nothing Daniels, who, I repeat, redeemed some of his reputation with the Garza trade. But where's that bat, Jon?

Word is, however, that Jon and Nolan are getting ballpark tight again. Well, good.

It was a once a diverse but productive combo. And that chemistry, although strange from a personality standpoint, should never have been altered. Right, Bob? Right, Ray?

Then there's the business-side embarrassment for the owners.

Get this:

Rick George, holding the second-most important job in the organization, departed the Rangers in July, seven months after his promotion, when he accepted less money and a job with far less prestige to become the athletic director at Colorado, a very-low-level player on the college scene.

So for the Rangers, the big organizational shake-up of November involved elevating to power a business guy who either didn't want the job to begin with, or didn't feel he was qualified to hold the job, or both.

If owners could be fired, then that's who you fire in Arlington. Any owner who approved the Rick George decision should be axed. Right, Bob? Right, Ray?

Bottom line:

Leave Ron Washington Alone.

He's doing his job, and doing it well.

And with Nolan now coming back into power (excuse the laughter), Mr. Ryan needs to start evaluating those who haven't done their jobs very well of late.

Oh, maybe he starts at the top. Right, Bob? Right, Ray?

A's get going quickly to beat Rangers, Matt Garza
Posted Saturday, Aug. 03, 2013
By Jeff Wilson

OAKLAND, Calif. — The usually patient Oakland A's evolved Saturday afternoon before Matt Garza's eyes.

Instead of taking his pitches as they did in a loss July 3 and as they often do against any pitcher, they jumped Garza in the first inning with a bunt hit, a sacrifice bunt, a single, a home run and another single in the span of his first 10 pitches of the game.

The resulting 3-0 hole was too big for another Texas Rangers escape, and Garza lost for the first time with his new team in a 4-2 defeat that snapped the Rangers' five-game winning streak.

Garza afterward tipped his cap to the A's for their adaptability, promising to be the one who makes the adjustment next time he faces the team that now leads the Rangers by 3 1/2 games in the American League West.

But the right-hander, acquired from the Chicago Cubs on July 22, also wasn't thrilled by the small-ball approach, which resulted in some terse words for Eric Sogard after a seventh-inning squeeze play gave the A's their final run.

"I asked where's a good place to eat in Oakland," Garza said. "They showed me how they were going to play and how they were going to attack me, and that's fine. Next time, I'll be ready. That's it.

"They had a big first inning. It's always tough when you put your guys three in the hole. I gave up three runs and four hits in the first five hitters and throw only 10 pitches. I was throwing strikes. It is what it is. I just had to grind it out the rest of the way."

Garza went the distance, allowing eight hits in eight innings and striking out five. But he needed 22 pitches in the first inning, which started with a bunt hit by Coco Crisp and a sacrifice by Eric Sogard on the first pitch.

Jed Lowrie singled on the next pitch for a 1-0 lead, and Yoenis Cespedes drove a slider down in the zone up and over the wall in left-center field.

"Back-to-back bunts in the first inning, and that from there let me know they were going to play small ball the rest of the day," Garza said. "Cespedes hits that rocket shot — it kind of carried out — and you just kind of go from there."

Brandon Moss followed with a single, but Garza (1-1 with Texas, 7-2 overall) retired the next nine A's and 12 of the next 13 as the Rangers climbed within 3-2 against Jarrod Parker (7-6).

Adrian Beltre delivered a two-out RBI single in the third, and Ian Kinsler launched a one-out solo homer in the fifth. The Rangers, though, went 1 for 7 against Parker with runners in scoring position, including three misses after Leonys Martin started the game with a double.

"We had some chances," said manager Ron Washington, who was denied the franchise's all-time win mark in his first chance to pass Bobby Valentine. "You can't chase them all in."

The Rangers managed only one hit after Kinsler's homer, a two-out single by Elvis Andrus in the seventh. Andrus stole second, but Sean Doolittle struck out Kinsler to snuff out the threat.

The A's then added some cushion in the seventh and ticked off Garza. But he was his own worst enemy by issuing a leadoff walk, the only free pass he allowed, to Alberto Callaspo.

A bunt by Stephen Vogt moved Callaspo to second, and he went to third on a Crisp single just in front of right fielder Nelson Cruz. Sogard then laid down the first pitch from Garza for a 4-2 lead.

Garza had a few colorful words for Sogard as he went back to the bench.

"He didn't respond," Garza said.

The goal now for the Rangers is to return to O.co Coliseum on Sunday to try to win the series and keep the heat on the A's. Derek Holland, who is 5-0 with a 2.45 ERA in his past eight starts on the road, gets the start for the Rangers.

"These are some big games right now," Holland said. "We can make up some big ground right now on Oakland. It could be a turning point, and maybe we can take off."

Rangers notes: Manny still in Triple A, still not an option to call up

Posted Saturday, Aug. 03, 2013

By Jeff Wilson

OAKLAND, Calif. — Manny Ramirez continues to not be viewed as a serious option to help the Texas Rangers this season, but the club isn't planning to let him loose from his minor league contract.

Ramirez, 41, is playing regularly for Triple A Round Rock, where he has hits in six of his past seven games to lift his average to .280 (23 for 80) in 22 games.

But he has only five extra-base hits and hasn't homered since July 14, and his bat is seen as too slow to be effective against major league pitching.

Ramirez, though, continues to be happy in the minor leagues, and the Rangers seem content to let him be.

"We've always kept it on the back burner, and we've continued to progress as if we weren't going to have his services," assistant general manager Thad Levine said Saturday. "I think that's still our approach with him."

While the reports on his ability haven't been overwhelming, the reports on his attitude continue to make a favorable impression. Ramirez, who doesn't have an out in the minor-league deal he signed last month, hasn't been pushing the Rangers for a decision.

"He's been terrific in that regard," Levine said. "He's down there playing. He's not having daily, weekly conversations with us or his agent. They understand that if his performance demands a promotion, it's going to happen. If not, he understands the onus is on him to prove his worth to the big league team."

Ross searching

Left-hander Robbie Ross knows that his numbers aren't good against left-handers, who are hitting .333 against him. But he's trying to keep it positive.

"Oh, I'm very aware of it," Ross said. "I got one last night, on a missile. I'll take it."

Of late, though, Ross isn't enjoying the success he has had much of the past two seasons. He has allowed 48 hits in 47 1/3 innings, and he got only two outs Friday night in the fifth inning before Jason Frasor wiggled out of the bases-loaded jam.

Ross is working on everything, from the mental side of pitching to harnessing his command.

"It's tough right now," he said. "Physically, I feel great. It's not like it's been a big bump in the road, but I've been having games here and there, and it's snowballed a little bit. I've just got to overcome it."

Ogando's struggles

Alexi Ogando is scheduled to make his next scheduled start on Wednesday in Anaheim after again struggling with his command on Friday in a no-decision against Oakland.

The right-hander walked five and threw 92 pitches over four innings in his third start since coming off the disabled list on July 23. He left with a 6-3 lead, but he understood the hook because of his heavy workload.

Only 48 of his pitches were strikes. Ogando says that he is still trying to work off some DL rust, and the only way to get over that is to keep facing hitters.

"He's not hurt, so now it's a matter of getting his command," manager Ron Washington said. "As long as nothing is wrong, we feel things will work themselves out."

Ogando made only one start from May 15 to July 22.

Briefly

- Michael Kirkman will continue to work as a starter during his rehab assignment after hitting the DL to receive treatment for skin cancer. He allowed two runs on seven hits in five innings on Friday in his first rehab start for Round Rock.

- Neftali Feliz will work as a reliever while returning from Tommy John surgery. He walked one and struck out two, hitting 94 mph, in his first rehab outing on Friday in the Arizona League.

Rangers' Lewis pitches five innings at Frisco, says he's ready

Posted Saturday, Aug. 03, 2013

By John Henry

Special to the Star-Telegram

FRISCO — Texas Rangers starting pitcher Colby Lewis reiterated that he's major league ready after giving himself a passing grade in his fourth, and presumably last, rehabilitation start with Double-A Frisco on Saturday.

Lewis threw 86 pitches, 59 for strikes, in five innings against the San Antonio Missions at Dr Pepper Ballpark.

The right-hander gave up two runs on six hits, including a home run — to Reymond Fuentes, the second of 22 hitters he faced. He also yielded a double and triple, walking one batter and striking out three.

“I felt like my stamina is getting better each time I go out,” Lewis said. “I definitely felt like I could have gone out for another [inning], that’s for sure.”

Lewis topped the radar gun at 90 mph, hitting that three times. His average fastball was 88 mph.

He struck out leadoff hitter Rico Noel and No. 3 hitter Tommy Medica with sliders in an 18-pitch first inning. A more efficient nine-pitch second inning was followed with 24 in the third.

“I felt like my misses were all in the same area,” Lewis said. “It wasn’t bad misses. When I did miss it was in the location I wanted it to be.

“Other than that I commanded the ball pretty well and threw some good changeups.”

Lewis appeared ahead of schedule in returning from surgery to repair a torn flexor tendon in his right elbow that sidelined him for most of the second half of last season.

Triceps tendinitis and muscle soreness, though, have twice interrupted previous rehabilitation stints.

Lewis said he has not been given any indication what the club’s plans are.

Three weeks ago, Lewis seemingly would have slid right into the rotation, but the rotation of Yu Darvish, Derek Holland, Matt Garza, Alexi Ogando and Martin Perez has gone 2-3 with a 3.60 ERA over 10 starts in the last two turns.

“We’ve got five guys that are kind of locking it down,” Lewis said. “We’ll see what happens.”

Matt Harrison, another starter who has missed most of the season with a back injury, is slated to pitch three innings Sunday night for Frisco against the Missions.

Rangers farm stock dips, but Jon Daniels isn’t worried

Posted Saturday, Aug. 03, 2013

By Drew Davison

The farm system is not barren, Jon Daniels said.

The Texas Rangers general manager said he would not have made any trades that would have put what has separated his team from the pack and been a key part to the recent success in jeopardy.

But the Rangers’ system is also not ranked as one of the top five in the game anymore, which is OK. The Rangers know it’s virtually impossible to have a top-five farm system year after year.

Part of the reason is that prospects such as Jurickson Profar, Leonys Martin and Martin Perez graduated to the big-league level. Part of the reason is trades, such as giving up four, possibly five, prospects to the Chicago Cubs for starter Matt Garza.

Mike Olt, one of the better power hitters in the system and the closest to the big leagues, was part of the Garza trade. So were right-handers Justin Grimm, who had reached the majors, and C.J. Edwards, a Class A pitcher who projects as a middle-of-the-rotation starter.

A fourth, and possibly fifth player, will also be headed to the Cubs to complete the trade.

“We paid what we feel is a premium to get, in our opinion, the most impactful, difference-making guy on the market,” Daniels said. “We wouldn’t have done it if that would have left us barren and we’re far from it.

“It definitely hurts [to lose prospects], we paid a real price, and you can’t get those guys back. But we wouldn’t have done it if we weren’t confident we had waves of players in addition to that group that we paid [with].”

Daniels went on to praise the work of his scouting and development departments, and said they are the reason the Rangers are in just about every conversation when it comes to players on the trade market.

The state of the Rangers' farm system today might not be as good as it was going into the season, but it still ranks as one of the better ones in the game, according to Baseball Prospectus writer Jason Parks.

"They have a case for a top-10 ranking based on the depth and the high-ceiling players in the lower minors," Parks said. "It's a strong system that's sustainable, but not top tier at present."

Said Rangers director of minor league operations Jake Krug: "Guys being traded is a part of the game, and we might not have a top-five system every year, but we should be up there. It may fluctuate, but we should always have depth and talent."

The next wave of players include several at Low A Hickory. Catcher Jorge Alfaro might be the best prospect on the farm now, with infielders Joey Gallo and Nomar Mazara and outfielder Lewis Brinson in the mix.

At Short A Spokane, there is this year's first-round pick, right-hander Chi Chi Gonzalez, along with other 2013 draft selections, including right-handers David Ledbetter and Cole Wiper.

The upper levels might be lacking high-end players, but Double A Frisco just got replenished with a few from High A Myrtle Beach. Infielders Luis Sardinas and Rougned Odor, along with right-hander Luke Jackson, are with the RoughRiders and looking to make a successful jump.

Triple A Round Rock has a few relievers who have called Arlington home at some point this season in right-handers Wilmer Font and Cory Burns and left-hander Joseph Ortiz.

With all the trades and "graduations" the Rangers' system clearly isn't as flush as it once was, but it is far from barren.

"I feel very good about how our system is doing at this point," said Tim Purpura, the Rangers' senior director of player development. "Our mission is to have players available at all times when JD needs them, whether or not that need is in Arlington or in the trade market."

Elsewhere on the farm

Triple A Round Rock: Carlos Pimentel was promoted from Double A Frisco to Round Rock on Thursday. Pimentel was 8-7 with a 4.09 ERA over 22 games, including 21 starts, with the RoughRiders. He had a 2.60 ERA over five starts in July.

Double A Frisco: Manager Steve Buechele received a few of the better prospects this week. The Rangers promoted infielders Luis Sardinas and Rougned Odor, as well as right-hander Luke Jackson and two other pitchers, from High A Myrtle Beach to Frisco.

Low A Hickory: First baseman Ronald Guzman landed on the disabled list after being hit on the right hand with a pitch earlier this week.

Arizona updates: Right-handers Matt West and David Perez, each rehabbing from Tommy John elbow surgery, are making good progress and could throw in games before the season ends.... Right-hander Cody Buckel has shown strides in his battle with the throwing yips, and the hope is to have him pitch again this year.

MLB Insider: Josh Hamilton a disappointment, but not all that's wrong with Angels

Posted Saturday, Aug. 03, 2013

By Jeff Wilson

When the 2013 season comes to a close and the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim find themselves in third or fourth place in the American League West, the blame game will likely take an extended turn with Josh Hamilton.

Hamilton's season continues to circle the porcelain throne, with his average solidly under .230 and his power numbers flickering from the heights he reached last season while playing for a big contract.

Oh, he got the contract, and the hard-to-watch shampoo commercial, not to mention the target on the back of his uniform in the off-chance that the Angels, preseason darlings, were to fall short of expectations.

After watching the Angels throughout the season, and especially last week at Rangers Ballpark, they have fallen woefully short.

Hamilton isn't the only problem, but he rates as a mighty flaw in the Angels' failed championship plans.

"You'd like to come in and just destroy it so people wouldn't have anything to talk about," Hamilton said last week as the Angels were swept in three games by the Rangers.

"The player I like to think I am, the expectations are going to be there, and I want them there. It almost helps hold me accountable for the work I do. But it's unreasonable to think that expectations are always going to be met."

In Hamilton's defense, he has yet to make a relief appearance out of a terrible bullpen that was supposed to have Ryan Madson at closer. The problem is that Madson has yet to throw a pitch on the way back from Tommy John surgery.

So, Ernesto Frieri has been the ninth-inning man. Yikes.

And has there been a worse free-agent signing than Joe Blanton to fill out the rotation? Well, maybe Hamilton, who signed a five-year, \$125 million deal in December.

Meanwhile, Hamilton has stayed remarkably healthy, at least physically, which is more than Albert Pujols, Jered Weaver, Erick Aybar, Jason Vargas and Peter Bourjos, among others, can say.

That Hamilton hasn't dealt with injury yet continues to flail away, entering Saturday with a .221 average and 108 strikeouts in 101 games, is his big personal mystery.

"This is the first time in my career, ever, since I started playing baseball, that I've struggled like this," said Hamilton, who saw his string of five straight All-Star Game appearances snapped this year. "Sometimes you just can't explain things."

Manager Mike Scioscia, the longest-tenured manager in the majors, can't be faulted for searching for ways to get Hamilton going. Scioscia ordered a few days off earlier in the season so that Hamilton could work on his swing, and has moved him around in the lineup in the hopes that something will click.

Not even chewing tobacco, which Hamilton has returned to using after a long drama last season during which he tried to quit it, has done the trick.

Hamilton looked OK at Rangers Ballpark, driving in four runs Tuesday and delivering the Angels' lone run Wednesday with a long home run off Martin Perez. But he hasn't been able to sustain the good times this season for an extended period.

"There's been bits and pieces where I feel great for one day or two or three days, and then it's gone," Hamilton said. "So — you know me, I look at things a little bit differently than other people — there's a reason for that. When you go through that struggle, perseverance comes up and it's about not giving up and not giving in."

Through it all, Hamilton insists that he has no regrets about taking the Angels' money and departing his comfort zone in Arlington. He continues to work under the theory that being put in new places brings new challenges, and he has definitely gotten what he asked for during Year One at the Big A.

The goal for Hamilton the rest of the way is to drive in some more runs and win as many games as possible.

"There comes points in the season where you've got to let things go," Hamilton said. "The average is not going to be there at the end of the year, but the opportunity for RBIs and to help the team win are still there."

"We still feel like we're where we're supposed to be. God takes us out of our comfort zone sometimes so we can grow."

DALLAS MORNING NEWS

Fraley: Rangers' Garza goes ballistic after A's break out bunts to sting him

GERRY FRALEY

Published: 03 August 2013 10:32 PM

OAKLAND, Calif. — The word will spread through the American League. The best way to disrupt, distract and even defeat Rangers right-hander Matt Garza is to bunt away.

Four bunts were vital to Oakland as the Athletics ended the Rangers' winning streak at five games with a 4-2 victory Saturday at the Coliseum. Oakland returned to a 3 1/2-game lead over the Rangers in the AL West.

The lasting scene was an incensed Garza raging at the bespectacled Eric Sogard after his second successful bunt on a safety squeeze play in the seventh inning. Garza is of the school that scoring by bunts is a less than manly way to play the game.

"I asked him where was a good place to eat in Oakland," Garza said.

That was untrue. The Rangers stay in San Francisco when playing the Athletics.

Sogard offered a more honest response. Garza was angry because of the flurry of bunts and let fly with a compound obscenity.

The bunts were by design, Sogard said. The scouting report stressed Garza does not field his position well. (He had a three-base throwing error in his Rangers debut.) The Athletics went after that weakness with bunts.

"It's kind of no secret that Garza has some trouble throwing to first sometimes," Sogard said. "Small ball is definitely a tool we have and can use. We scored, and anytime that happens he's not going to be happy."

Oakland had three sacrifices and a bunt single that produced two runs. It was an out-of-character display by the Athletics, who began play tied for last in the AL in sacrifices with 10, but it made sense. They tried the conventional way against Garza on July 3 and reached him for only one run in eight innings in a loss.

Rangers manager Ron Washington, an admirer of diversified offense, saluted the Athletics.

"The guys that bunted are capable of bunting, and they broke it out," Washington said. "They executed."

The Athletics played small ball from the start. Coco Crisp started the first with a well-placed bunt single up the third-base line and advanced on Sogard's sacrifice. Crisp scored on Jed Lowrie's single.

Garza had not been scored upon in the first inning in his previous 17 starts, dating to last season with the Chicago Cubs. The bunts were the prelude to a blast as Yoenis Cespedes clubbed a two-run homer on a low slider. After only six pitches, Garza trailed, 3-0.

"It's always tough when you put your guys in a hole at the start of the game," Garza said. "I didn't really do my job."

Garza rallied and shut down the Athletics through the sixth, and the Rangers cut the deficit to 3-2 on a single by Adrian Beltre and Ian Kinsler's homer.

In the process, the Rangers missed numerous chances. They went 1-for-7 with runners in scoring position against starter Jarrod Parker, who lasted six innings.

"You can't cash 'em all in," Washington said.

Oakland went back to the bunt to score a vital extra run in the seventh.

Alberto Callaspo led off and reached on Garza's only walk. Callaspo took second on Stephen Vogt's sacrifice and third on a single. Athletics manager Bob Melvin put on the safety squeeze for the first pitch to Sogard, and he pushed the bunt to an angry Garza to get the run.

"You could tell it was frustrating to him," said Oakland first base coach Tye Waller, who heard every blue word from Garza. "But it's baseball. I'm sure he saw that before. It worked against him this time."

Garza could face the Athletics two more times in September series that should have playoff implications. Let the bunters beware, Garza said.

"They showed me how they're going to play, how they're going to attack me," Garza said. "That's fine. Next time, I'll be ready."

Thanks to Arlington barber, Rangers can take their cuts in the clubhouse

MICHAEL FLOREK

Published: 03 August 2013 09:06 PM

ARLINGTON — Chris Antonio's barber shop, Xclusivo Cutz, hadn't been open a week when Elvis Andrus came in for a haircut.

The conversation came easy, Andrus left satisfied and a friendship was born. But most important, Andrus looked good.

So good that his teammates took notice.

"[Adrian] Beltre, I remember one day he was like, 'Do you have somebody that cuts your hair?'" Andrus said. "I was like, 'Well, yeah, I know this guy.' ... He was like, 'OK, tell him to come over as soon as he can.'"

So Antonio did. Almost five years later, he's still leaving his shop in Arlington — a mere 15 minutes from Rangers Ballpark — to come over whenever the Rangers need their mops mowed.

His improvised office in the clubhouse adjoins the team's weight room. Its contents: a restroom with a barber station and a steady stream of Rangers players and coaches.

Antonio, 41, will cut hair for anywhere from seven to nine straight hours, occasionally returning the next day to get through everybody.

"We have plenty of perks in this job, and that's one of them," said outfielder David Murphy. "Early in my career it was a little easier, but now that I have three kids and I'm trying to maximize my time at home and my time with my family, those little tasks are more difficult to accomplish, so it's nice that there's people around here to make stuff like that easier."

Antonio grew up in the Dominican Republic, where he learned to cut hair from his mother. The story goes that when Antonio was 12 or 13, his mother had three clients waiting while she was busy with other parts of her fashion design business.

Antonio had dabbled with his mom's equipment before, giving an "ugly cut, ugly cut" to a friend, so she asked him to cut one of the waiting customers' hair. The man ended up liking it, and even paid for it. Antonio has been making money by cutting hair ever since.

He immigrated to the United States in 1994 in search of more opportunity, opening a barber shop in New Jersey, then relocating to Texas, where he met Andrus.

In his time with the Rangers, he's learned a few things, such as Beltre's dislike for having his head touched. (Antonio tries not to hold it when cutting the hair.) Or that haircuts for outfielder Nelson Cruz and Andrus take much longer than for everybody else. (Antonio isn't sure why, but it takes so long that Cruz's wife complains about it.)

"He takes a lot of pride," Cruz said. "There's a lot of details that I don't even know. I'll ask, 'What are you doing?' He's like, 'I'm doing something you don't know.'"

Aside from his hair-cutting ability, the thing that has made Antonio a fixture in the Rangers clubhouse is his ability to talk about anything.

He'll talk to Andrus about his brother, then talk to Cruz about the slugger's allergies or how Antonio was having trouble sleeping.

"We're laughing about everything," Antonio said. "People ask me when I cut these guys' hair, how I feel. I feel like a normal person. ... I feel like I've got friends. Like I've got a family."

In some cases, that's a result of a relationship that extends beyond the chair. Antonio counts Andrus and fellow Dominicans Cruz and Alexi Ogando as friends, among others. His relationship with Cruz extends so far that Cruz has hosted some of Antonio's relatives at his house in the Dominican Republic.

Cruz used to play baseball not far from San Francisco de Macoris, where Antonio grew up.

Two thousand miles away, they met for the first time in the Rangers clubhouse.

"We have a lot to talk about," Cruz said.

When it comes to Antonio, Cruz isn't alone.

Was Profar's 'violent' swing reason he was knocked down twice by A's closer Balfour in 9th?

By Gerry Fraley

7:25 pm on August 3, 2013

Rookie Jurickson Profar may have irritated the Athletics with his big and violent swing.

Profar twice hit catcher Steve Vogt on the backswing. Profar's bat caught Vogt on the hand in the second inning and the top of the head in the sixth. Vogt was woozy after being struck on the head but stayed in the game through the eighth. He went for tests afterward, but the Athletics do not believe he incurred a concussion.

"I can't believe he hit me that far back," Vogt said. "I'm not that close to the plate. I moved back after he got me the first time, and he still got me pretty good."

It may have been only coincidence, but Oakland closer Grant Balfour twice knocked down Profar with up-and-in 93-mph fastballs when he batted again in the ninth. Profar tried to check his swing on the second pitch but failed and struck out.

"Does he does that to everybody?" Profar asked.

Struggling Ogando says he's healthy, will make next start; 'key is him being honest with us,' Washington says

By Gerry Fraley

7:23 pm on August 3, 2013

OAKLAND, Calif. – The Rangers believe right-hander Alexi Ogando when he says his slow progress since returning from the disabled list is not health related.

Ogando on Friday allowed a career-high five walks in four rocky innings and received a no decision in the Rangers' 8-3 win against Oakland. In three starts since coming off the DL, Ogando has worked a total of 13 2/3 innings and has more walks than strikeouts: 7-4.

His velocity has been below its pre-DL level. Against Oakland, Ogando had an average fastball of 92.3 mph with a top speed of 94.5. On June 5 at Boston, in his last start before going on the DL, Ogando had an average fastball of 94 mph with a top speed of 96.6.

Ogando, speaking through an interpreter, said he feels at full strength and is over the shoulder inflammation that put him on the DL. The Rangers accept that.

"The key is him being honest with us that nothing is wrong," manager Ron Washington said on Saturday. "As long as nothing is wrong, we feel comfortable that he'll finally figure it out."

Ogando will remain in the rotation and take his normal turn on Wednesday at the Los Angeles Angels.

"The thing is he's not hurt," Washington said. "It's a matter of him getting his command. If he gets his command, that'll all take care of itself."

Rangers' Colby Lewis makes another rehab start; club expects Feliz back in September

By Gerry Fraley

7:28 pm on August 3, 2013

From the crowded Department of Injury Rehabilitation:

+ Right-hander Colby Lewis made his fifth injury-rehabilitation start with Double-A Frisco and seventh overall. The club is uncertain of the next step for Lewis. He can remain in the minors on rehab assignment through Aug. 15. If Lewis makes one more start on four days rest, he would be on the same schedule as Ogando. That would figure in the club's decision.

+ Right-hander Neftali Feliz, recovering from Tommy John tendon-transplant surgery, pitched in a game on Friday night for the first time since May 18, 2012. He had two strikeouts in a scoreless inning with the rookie-level Arizona League club. Assistant general manager Thad Levine said the club expects Feliz to pitch in the majors in September.

+ Left-hander Michael Kirkman pitched five innings in his first rehab appearance, with TripleA Round Rock, on Friday night. Levine said Kirkman will prepare as a starter so that he can make up for lost time and also be ready for a variety of roles on the major-league level.

This was Kirkman's first game appearance since June 6. He is on the disabled list because of cutaneous lymphoma.

Struggling vs. lefties, Robby Ross will work in long relief for a while

By Gerry Fraley

7:30 pm on August 3, 2013

BRIEFLY: Left-hander Robbie Ross will move into more of a long-relief role while he deals with his problems against left-handed hitters. Washington said he has only two relievers capable of working multiple innings: right-hander Ross Wolf and Ross. In Ross' last 16 appearances, left-handed hitters are batting .390 for 41 at-bats against him. ... If rotations hold, the Rangers will miss two top starters on the final two legs of this trip. They are not scheduled to face ace Jered Weaver during a three-game series against the Los Angeles Angeles Angels and will not have to deal with Houston rookie sensation Jerred Cosart during a four-game series against the Astros. Cosart is only the second pitcher in the last 100 years to start his career with four consecutive starts of at least six innings with one run or none allowed in each game. Cincinnati's Wayne Simpson accomplished the feat in 1970.

ESPN DALLAS

Rapid Reaction: A's 4, Rangers 2

August, 3, 2013

By Eric Gilmore | Special to ESPNDallas.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- The Rangers' five-game winning streak came to an end Saturday afternoon as they suffered a 4-2 loss to the Oakland A's in the second game of their three-game series, which is tied at one win apiece. The Rangers fell 3½ games behind the first-place A's in the American League West. Oakland snapped its three-game losing streak.

Mulligan in order: Right-hander Matt Garza, making his third start since being traded by the Cubs to the Rangers, gave up three runs and four hits in the first inning. Coco Crisp led off with a drag bunt single, moved to second on a sacrifice bunt and scored on Jed Lowrie's sharp single to left. Yoenis Cespedes, who won the Home Run Derby, sent a monstrous two-run blast into the left-field seats, giving the A's a 3-0 lead.

Back on track: After giving up three quick runs, Garza got back on track. He escaped the first without further damage then threw five straight shutout innings before giving up a run in the seventh. Garza had won six straight decisions before taking the loss Saturday, falling to 7-2 overall for the season and 1-1 with the Rangers. He allowed four runs on eight hits, pitching the first complete game by a Ranger since Derek Holland on June 27; it's the Rangers' first complete-game loss of the season. Garza struck out five and walked one. He threw 114 pitches, 76 for strikes.

Kinsler goes deep: Ian Kinsler launched his 10th home run of the season, a solo shot off A's right-hander Jarrod Parker in the fifth inning. Kinsler snapped an 18-game homerless stretch. It was his first home run since July 11 at Baltimore and 153rd of his career. Kinsler sent Parker's 1-0 pitch high and deep down the left-field line, just inside the foul pole.

Glove work: Rangers right fielder Nelson Cruz made a stellar defensive play in the bottom of the second, robbing A's second baseman Alberto Callaspo of extra bases. Cruz made a leaping catch on Callaspo's high drive, rammed into the

wall and held on to the ball. Cruz is making a habit of big defensive plays at the Coliseum. In a 6-2 Rangers' win at Oakland on May 15, he made a diving catch of a Brandon Moss line drive, likely saving two runs in the sixth inning.

Still streaking: Rangers shortstop Elvis Andrus lined a two-out single to center in the seventh inning off A's reliever Sean Doolittle, extending his hitting streak to 16 games. That is the longest current streak in the major leagues, is the longest by a Ranger this season and ties Andrus' career high. After singling, Andrus stole his 25th base of the season but was stranded at second.

Up next: Left-hander Holland (8-6, 3.18 ERA) gets the start Sunday for the Rangers and will oppose A's right-hander A.J. Griffin (10-7, 3.90) in the finale of this series. Sunday's 3:05 p.m. game will be broadcast on Fox Sports Southwest, ESPN Dallas 103.3 FM and ESPN Deportes 1540 AM.

After rough start, Garza shows composure

August 3, 2013

By Eric Gilmore | Special to ESPNDallas.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- By the time Texas Rangers right-hander Matt Garza threw his seventh pitch Saturday, the Oakland Athletics owned a 3-0 lead.

Coco Crisp led off with a drag bunt single, moved to second on Eric Sogard's sacrifice bunt and scored on Jed Lowrie's single. Then Yoenis Cespedes sent pitch No. 6, a slider, over the left field wall for a two-run homer.

Impressive start? Hardly. But after that nightmare beginning, Garza, according to Rangers manager Ron Washington, showed why Texas acquired him in a July 22 trade from the Chicago Cubs.

Garza went on to pitch a complete game, the first by a Ranger since June 27, when Derek Holland shut out the Yankees. Garza allowed eight hits but just four runs over eight innings.

The Rangers suffered a 4-2 loss that snapped their five-game winning streak and dropped them 3½ games behind the A's in the American League West. But Garza made Oakland earn the win.

"He showed me what we knew we were getting," Washington said. "A competitor. He doesn't let issues early affect what he's out there to do. He finished the game. He did a good job. He gave us a chance. That's all you ask."

Garza beat the A's earlier in the season when he was still pitching for the Cubs. He allowed just one run on four hits over eight innings that day. This time, the A's decided to change their plan of attack and play small ball -- well, other than when Cespedes hit his 17th home run of the season.

"It was a great bunt. Coco's a great bunter," Garza said. "You just tip your cap. Then Sogard bunted him over. Back-to-back bunts in the first inning. That from there kind of let me know they were going to play small ball all day. Cespedes hits that rocket shot. It hung up there and kind of carried out. You just kind of go from there. Three-nothing out of the gates, and your mindset is just go out there, keep attacking and keep your guys in the game and go as long as you can."

Garza, who made his third start as a Ranger, threw five straight shutout innings after the first, allowing two hits -- a Josh Donaldson single and a Brandon Moss ground-rule double that center fielder Leonys Martin lost in the sun.

"I feel he made a good adjustments after the first inning," Rangers catcher Geovany Soto said. "He went after hitters. I felt he was smart with his pitches. He moved the ball around and got a lot of early outs, got ground balls, got fly balls. He battled and settled down after that first inning."

The A's added a fourth run against Garza in the seventh, continuing their small-ball attack. Alberto Callaspo led off with a walk and advanced to second on Stephen Vogt's sacrifice bunt. Callaspo moved to third on Crisp's single and scored when Sogard sent a safety squeeze bunt down the first base line. An obviously frustrated Garza had no choice but to get the out at first, and he had some words for Sogard.

"I asked him where's a good place to eat in Oakland," Garza said. "That's about it. Like I said, they showed me how they're going to play and how they were going to attack me. That's fine. Next time I'll be ready."

Next time he'll make sure not to throw Cespedes another low slider.

"I thought it was down, but that's his zone down there," Washington said of Cespedes. "You throw him something down there, you know he'll swing at some things that hit the dirt. But you throw him something down there that don't hit the dirt, that's what he does pretty good. He's strong. He went down there and got it. You got to give him credit."

Garza's teammates gave him credit for battling after a rough start.

"It was awesome," Rangers left fielder David Murphy said. "That's exactly why you keep battling. Just because you give up runs early, doesn't mean you can't stay in the game and give your team a fighting chance. That's exactly what he did."

Buzz: Holland's numbers bode well

August 3, 2013

By Eric Gilmore | Special to ESPNDallas.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- When the Texas Rangers send left-hander Derek Holland to the mound Sunday afternoon for the finale of their three-game series against Oakland, they should like their chances. One look at his numbers on the road tells you that.

Holland is 6-1 with a 2.89 ERA in 11 road starts this season. Over his past eight road starts, he's 5-0 with a 2.45 ERA.

"I don't really think about it," Holland said Saturday about his success on the road. "The main thing is you've got to perform whether it's at home or on the road. You never think one way's better. I just got to go out there and match the pitcher. ... I got to go pitch for pitch with [A's starter A.J. Griffin] and do everything I can to give the team a chance to win so we can gain as much ground as we can on Oakland."

Holland's career numbers against the A's are equally impressive. Holland is 4-1 against the A's in nine career starts and has won four straight decisions since losing his first start against Oakland on Aug. 4, 2009.

"It's a good lineup," Holland said of the A's. "They're obviously doing good things. They're in first place for a reason. You don't get to be in first place for sucking or whatever. They definitely got some guys that get overlooked, it seems like. [Josh] Donaldson's had a great year, and [Yoenis] Cespedes, he's been putting on a show. He definitely showed it in the Home Run Derby, too. You never take anybody light. And it seems like every time we play each other it's always an intense game all the way through. ... Both teams are good."

The Rangers pulled to within 2½ games of the A's with an 8-3 victory Friday night.

"They're all big games from here on out," Holland said. "We are chasing Oakland at the moment. We're trying to gain as much ground as we can so every time we go out it's always going to be a big game, especially now that we're close to the end of the season. Obviously, every game counts, but these are definitely some big games now."

Comeback road: Left-hander Michael Kirkman threw five innings Friday night for Triple-A Round Rock against Fresno in his first rehab assignment. He has been on the disabled list since June 9 after a recurrence of cutaneous lymphoma, a form of skin cancer, in the area of his right triceps. Kirkman allowed two runs on seven hits, walking two and striking out two. Kirkman went 0-2 with an 8.18 ERA in 25 relief appearances for the Rangers, but assistant general manager Thad Levine said Kirkman is preparing for a wide range of possible roles.

"I think the initial start was to give him time on the mound, iron out some things, but I think we always viewed it as why not stretch him out as a starter?" Levine said. "It gives him an opportunity to come back either as a starter, long man or a short man out of the pen, rather than building him up as a short man and then you really only have one alternative how you could use him if you bring him back to the big leagues. So we wanted to keep as many options open for him to be able to impact in the big leagues."

"We were encouraged by the outing last night. The velocity was 90-94 [miles per hour], and the reports read like somebody who was the first time back in a game, so there was some rustiness, but he worked through that on the mound and was competitive."

Injury updates: Right-hander Neftali Feliz, who underwent Tommy John surgery in August 2012, pitched one inning Friday for the Rangers' rookie level team in the Arizona League. Levine said he hit as high as 92 or 93 mph on the radar gun and will likely move to one of the club's other minor league affiliates soon.

"He's going to go on a rehab [assignment] as a reliever," Levine said. "So he'll be going in one-inning stints. So I think there's an ability, if we wanted to, to fast-track that, but we're also not rushing that, considering the injury he came back from. But we do hope and expect to have him make an impact in the big leagues this year."

Right-hander Matt Harrison, who underwent two surgeries on his back and has been on the disabled list since April 11, threw 1⅓ innings Wednesday for Double-A Frisco and will have another rehab outing Sunday.

Levine said reports on Harrison "were good" after Wednesday's outing. He allowed no runs on two hits while striking out two and walking one.

"It's his first outing back from -- he had two back surgeries in the course of a 10-day period. I think what happened is he kind of ran out of steam," Levine said. "Physically, it was a little bit taxing on him. He's still working to get back into pitching shape, but, performance wise, he was fine. His stuff was fine."

No change on Manny: Left fielder Manny Ramirez was hitting .280 with three home runs and 12 RBIs in 22 games entering play Saturday for Triple-A Round Rock. At this point, the Rangers have no plans to promote him, Levine said.

"When we signed him, I think we were of the mindset if he came up and helped the team, that would be terrific, but we didn't want to put ourselves in a position where we were dependent upon it or really put the pressure on him that he was coming in as a potential savior," Levine said. "So we've always kept it on the backburner and we've continued to progress as if we weren't going to have his services and then if he forced his way into the big leagues that would be a pleasant surprise. I think that's still our approach with him.

"If he forces his way in, that's terrific, but it's not something as if we're counting down the days or reliant in any capacity to him coming up and helping us. If he does that, that would be great."

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Rangers' five-game winning streak halted by A's

ASSOCIATED PRESS |

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OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) -- Yoenis Cespedes provided the power and Eric Sogard gave Oakland a little bit of punch. It was a winning formula.

Cespedes hit a two-run home run to help the Athletics end the Texas Rangers' five-game winning streak with a 4-2 victory Saturday.

Sogard drove in an insurance run with a safety squeeze that had Matt Garza steaming for a bit. Jed Lowrie also drove in a run for the A's, who ended a three-game losing streak. Brandon Moss and Coco Crisp each added two hits.

Garza hollered at Sogard after the play in the seventh inning gave the A's a cushion.

"I asked him if there were any good places to eat in Oakland," Garza joked afterward.

Sogard said he couldn't make out what Garza was saying.

"We scored a run though," he said, "so he's not going to be happy."

Garza (1-1 in the AL, 7-2 overall) lost for the first time since June 11 and the Rangers lost ground on the AL West Division leading A's for the first time in nearly a week, falling 3 1-2 games back.

Jarrod Parker (7-6) gave up two runs on six hits over six innings. He walked two and struck out six. He ended a streak of six straight no decisions and is 5-0 over his last 12 starts.

"After the leadoff double I just wanted to minimize the damage," Parker said. "To put a zero was huge."

Ian Kinsler homered and Adrian Beltre also drove in a run for Texas.

Garza gave up four runs on eight hits over eight innings. He walked one and struck out five.

"They had a big first inning and it's always tough when you start in a hole," Garza said. "I thought I made a good pitch but Cespedes is a strong guy and the wind was aiding it because it stayed up there a long time."

Sean Doolittle, Ryan Cook and Grant Balfour each pitched an inning, with Balfour picking up his 29th save in 30 chances.

Four of the first five A's batters hit safely against Garza, with Lowrie driving in one run and Cespedes following with a two-run home run. Moss also singled before Garza got the final two outs.

"Sometimes you want to score before a starting pitcher gets comfortable," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "You try to get something off a good pitcher early to create a little havoc, and later to score a run."

Garza, who pitched in Oakland on July 3 with the Chicago Cubs, allowed runs in the first inning for the first time since last July 5 in Atlanta, when he gave up four.

"They showed how they were going to attack me," Garza said. "I didn't really do my job but I got deep into the game and gave the bullpen some rest."

Garza, who earned the Rangers second complete game of the season, retired 12 of the next 13 hitters he faced.

"He was good," Rangers' manager Ron Washington said. "He gave up three runs and gave us a complete game."

Beltre singled home a run in the third and Kinsler hit a one-out home run in the fifth to bring the Rangers within 3-2.

Parker allowed more than five hits in a start for the first time since May 22, when he allowed six hits to the Rangers in Texas, a span of 12 starts.

Moss doubled in the sixth when Texas centerfielder Leonys Martin lost a ball in the sun. It bounced behind him and then over the fence.

Sogard, who became the first A's player with two sacrifice bunts in the same game in over three years, delivered a safety squeeze to easily score Alberto Callapso, in the seventh.

NOTES: A's LHP Tommy Milone was optioned to Triple-A Sacramento and will likely start Thursday. RHP Evan Scribner was recalled to take his place on the roster. ... Oakland LHP Brett Anderson will throw a simulated game in Stockton on Tuesday. ... Sogard, who extended his career best hitting streak to 11 games, made his first start at shortstop in nearly a year. ... A's C John Jaso is still experiencing some dizziness from a concussion and will undergo extensive testing. He will not join the A's on their next road trip. ... The A's will send RHP A.J. Griffin (10-7, 3.90) to the mound on Sunday. He's given a major-league leading 26 home runs. ... The A's acquired RHP Fernando Nieve for cash considerations. Nieve last pitched in the majors in 2010 with the New York Mets. ... Rangers Michael Kirkman (form of skin cancer) went five innings in his first rehab start on Friday night. He's been on the DL since June 9. ... Texas RHP Neftali Feliz (Tommy John surgery) pitched an inning in the Arizona Rookie League on Friday. He will be rehabbed as a reliever. ... Rangers LHP Matt Harrison (back) will continue his rehab with a start Sunday with Double-A Frisco. ... Rangers RHP Colby Lewis (elbow surgery) was scheduled to make his fourth rehab start at Frisco on Saturday. ... LHP Derek Holland (8-6, 3.18) starts Sunday's series finale for the Rangers. He has won four straight decisions against the A's. ... Texas IF Elvis Andrus singled in the seventh to extend his career-high hitting streak to 16 games.

MYRTLE BEACH SUN

Potomac Nationals rally for victory over Myrtle Beach Pelicans

Published: August 3, 2013

From staff reports

Last night at the ballpark

Nationals 6, Pelicans 3

Game recap | Michael Taylor tripled in Cutter Dykstra in the fifth inning as the go-ahead run to lead Potomac past Myrtle Beach. Dykstra tied the game in the inning on an RBI double. The Nationals added three more in the sixth on back-to-back home runs. Kevin Keyes hit a two-run shot after an Adrian Nieto double, and Brandon Miller followed with a solo shot.

Star of the game | Keyes and Miller, who both homered and drove in two runs.

Stat of the game | 10.80 – Pelicans starter Kevin Pucetas' ERA after allowing six runs on 10 hits in five innings.

HICKORY DAILY RECORD

Asheville scores 12 unanswered runs to beat Crawdads By MARK PARKER Record Sports Correspondent

HICKORY, N.C. -- After winning the first two of a four-game series, Hickory seemed on its way to making it three straight with a big early lead.

But the bats of Asheville, the South Atlantic League's top hitting team, put up 12 unanswered runs to defeat the Crawdads 12-6 at L.P. Frans Stadium on Saturday night.

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Asheville (55-54 over all, 17-24 second half) snapped a four-game losing streak and picked up a rare road win. The Tourists, 5-15 on the road in the second half, will try to even the series at L.P. Frans Stadium at 5 p.m. on Sunday.

Hickory (62-50, 24-18) ran up a 6-0 lead after four innings, largely on the strength of three homers.

Nomar Mazara struck a three-run homer in the first inning, his 11th of the season, and homered in his third straight game. David Lyon added a solo shot and Nick Vickerson chipped in an RBI single to make it 5-0 in the second, then Lyon added his second solo homer of the game in the fourth, his sixth of the year.

Crawdads starter Luis Parra, who entered with a 1.90 ERA in 14 starts, cruised through the first four innings. He allowed just two hits and a walk.

But the first play in the top of the fifth inning seemed to change the momentum of the game.

Matt Argyropoulos opened the fifth with a line single off the glove hand of Parra. Parra shook off the injury and stayed in the game, but the inning began to fall apart afterward.

Derek Jones followed with a broken-bat single to left, and after Juan Ciriaco's sacrifice moved the runners to second and third, Parra walked Matt Wessinger to load the bases. Hickory manager Corey Ragsdale argued the call from the dugout on ball four.

Jason Stolz then hit into a force play to score Argyropoulos with the first run before Rosell Herrera's infield single scored Jones.

Tom Murphy capped the fifth-inning rally with a three-run homer to left to cut the deficit to 6-5. It was his 19th of the season and only the second allowed by Parra in 80 2/3 innings this season.

Ragsdale said Parra appeared to overcome the pain of being hit by the liner and actually pitched well enough to attempt to finish the inning.

"To be honest, I thought he made quality pitches," said Ragsdale of Parra remaining in the game. "I thought he made good enough pitches to get the guy out, but we didn't get the call to go our way. I think from that point on, we just couldn't grab the momentum back.

Asheville put together another big inning in the seventh to seize the lead.

Wessinger and Stolz opened the inning with back-to-back singles against reliever Jose Monegro (0-2). After Herrera fanned, Monegro walked Murphy to load the bases. Francisco Sosa shook off a 0-2 count and after just missing a hit on a foul to left, he connected on a changeup from Monegro for a grand slam to make it 9-6.

Jones also added a two run shot in the seventh and Stolz ended the uprising with a solo homer in the eighth.

Asheville's Alving Mejias (4-4) threw perfect innings in the sixth and seven to pick up the win. Brook Hart and Jacob Newberry each added a scoreless inning to close out the Crawdads, who put only one runner on after Lyon's homer in the fourth.

SPOKESMAN REVIEW

Horan's first pro baseball HR lifts Volcanoes over Indians Chris Derrick The Spokesman-Review

Tyler Horan took Friday night off after Spokane Indians pitchers made Thursday an unpleasant evening for him.

It would have helped the Indians' cause if Horan had also rested on Saturday night.

Horan hit his first professional home run – a two-run, opposite-field shot to left field – to cap a four-run eighth inning as the Salem-Keizer Volcanoes rallied past the Spokane Indians 6-5 before a sold-out crowd of 7,048 at Avista Stadium.

Horan, who struck out four times on Thursday, lined his homer on a 2-0 fastball from fourth Indians pitcher Keone Kela (0-1). The blast scored Brian Ragira, whose two-run double had cut Spokane's lead to 5-4. Horan and Ragira finished with three RBIs apiece.

"(Kela's) a hard-throwing guy and it was an outside pitch, so you just try to hit it that way," Horan said.

The Volcanoes' comeback came after Spokane batted around during a five-run seventh to lead 5-2. The Volcanoes hold a 3-1 advantage in the series heading in to this afternoon's finale, the last game before the Northwest League's All-Star break.

Kela entered with an earned-run average of 1.23 in 71/3 innings. Four earned runs in two-thirds of an inning later, his ERA ballooned to 5.63.

"Kela's our late-inning guy," Indians manager Tim Hulett said. "He's really our closer, but sometimes he closes in the seventh and eighth inning and that's why he was out there tonight. He just had one of those nights. I'd give him the ball again tomorrow night under those same circumstances."

Horan, a native of Massachusetts, played four seasons at Virginia Tech before San Francisco drafted him in the eighth round in June. He played 13 games for the Giants' team in the Arizona Rookie League before joining the Volcanoes.

His first pro homer came on his 138th at-bat.

"I've had a few that have made it to the (warning) track, but it's just a matter of time before you end up getting one out," Horan said.

Kela's problems started with one out, when he hit Randy Ortiz with a pitch and walked Tyler Hollick. Although he is 1 for 7 in the series, Hollick has walked six times and scored six runs.

"We know (Hollick) doesn't swing the bat and we're still having trouble throwing him strikes," Hulett said.

Ragira's second double of the night rocketed off the right-field fence to score Ortiz and Hollick.

"We had our guys on and the heart of our order coming up," Horan said. "Brian ... started the momentum and got us in the groove."

The Indians batted around in their seventh, collecting four singles and a double to energize the crowd after six shutout innings. Jamie Jarmon walked with the bases loaded; two runs scored on Eduard Pinto's infield single and an error by shortstop John Polonius; and Cam Schiller extended his hitting streak to eight games with a two-run double to right-center.

Noted

Left-handed pitcher Luis Pollorena joined the Indians, promoted from the Arizona Rookie League. The former Mississippi State pitcher signed a free-agent contract this year. He was 0-0 with a 1.04 ERA in seven games and 82/3 innings at the AZL.