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Kouzmanoff, Rangers rally past A's in series opener
AL Player of Week doubles, scores on Murphy's go-ahead single
By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com | 4/22/2014 3:06 AM ET

OAKLAND -- This is only April but the Rangers are playing the team with the best record in the American League in their own park. They are also playing the team that took the division title away from them the past two years, so games against the Athletics even this early have a pennant race feel to them.

That's why the Rangers were feeling good about themselves after coming back for a 4-3 victory over the Athletics in the first of 19 games these two teams will play against each other over six months. The Rangers were 17-21 against the Athletics over the past two seasons.

"It was a huge win, especially at the start of a road trip," shortstop Elvis Andrus said. "Every game is tough, especially here. We haven't had a lot of luck here so it means a lot to come in here and get that first win. But we have to continue to play good baseball."

The Rangers, with Yu Darvish on the mound, trailed 3-1 after two innings. But Darvish and four relievers kept it close while the Rangers battled their way back against starter Dan Straily and the Oakland bullpen.

This one came down to the Rangers going 3-for-10 with runners in scoring position while the Athletics were 1-for-10. Each team hit a solo home run leading off an inning, so those two extra hits with runners in scoring position made the difference for the Rangers.

"Any time you can get a win like that against this team it's good," first baseman Prince Fielder said. "You're not going to mash the ball every day so we just have to play good baseball, get runners over, play situational baseball and get runners in."

Kevin Kouzmanoff, just hours after being named the American League Player of the Week, had one of the big hits with runners in scoring position and also had a double to lead off the eighth in a tie game against reliever Sean Doolittle. Mitch Moreland bunted him to third and Donnie Murphy lined a single to bring home the go-ahead run.

"Any time you hand it over to our bullpen, we feel like we're going to be able to hold them and it's only going to be a matter of time before our offense finds a way to push across a run," Doolittle said. "I've got to be better than that. That can't happen."

Neal Cotts earned the victory in relief with Joakim Soria earning his fourth save. The Rangers are now 6-2 in one-run games.

The Rangers also won on a night when Darvish wasn't at his best. He gave up three runs in the second and lasted just six innings while throwing 116 pitches. But he was still able to hold the Athletics down after the second inning and the game was tied after he was done for the night.

"I think I had to battle mentally and I had to battle on the mound as well," Darvish said.

"He wasn't at his best but after that one inning, he began to make pitches," Rangers manager Ron Washington said. "He wasn't at his best but he was good enough to keep us in the ballgame."

Shin-Soo Choo, who left the game in the seventh with a sprained left ankle, gave the Rangers a 1-0 lead in the first with his first leadoff home run of the season and 12th of his career. The home run, off Straily, marked the first time Darvish has pitched with a lead this season. But it didn't last long.

Brandon Moss led off the second inning with a home run, his fourth in 16 career at-bats against Darvish. That ties him with Mike Trout for the most by an opponent. Darvish then walked Josh Reddick with one out, struck out Daric Barton and gave up a double to Eric Sogard.

That put runners on second and third, and Coco Crisp gave the Athletics a 3-1 lead with a two-run single to left. But that was the Athletics' only hit in eight at-bats with runners in scoring position against Darvish. They were also 0-for-2 off Soria in the ninth.

"We had him [Darvish] on the run a little bit early but he recovered well enough to keep him in the game and go deep enough in the game where they could go to their key bullpen guys," Athletics manager Bob Melvin said. "We've played many games very similar to that one the past couple of years."

The Rangers picked up one run in the fourth when Fielder led off with a double and scored on a single by Kouzmanoff. They tied it up the following inning on three straight two-out singles from Andrus, Rios and Fielder. The last hit snapped an 0-for-9 with runners in scoring position for Fielder.

"The A's grinded out their at-bats but fortunately we were able to grind all night," Washington said. "We were able to fight and put some runs on the board. I was very happy with our offensive execution."

**Choo sprains left ankle, likely out for rest of A's series
X-rays are negative; outfielder will have MRI, could miss next two games
By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com | 4/22/2014 12:56 A.M. ET**

OAKLAND -- The Rangers will likely be without outfielder Shin-Soo Choo for the next two games against the Athletics after he sprained his left ankle trying to beat out a base hit in the seventh inning on Monday night.

X-rays were negative but Choo was pretty sore after the game. He will have an MRI on Tuesday.

"I hit the bag hard," Choo said. "I don't know what happened but I wasn't comfortable and didn't want to make it worse."

Choo smacked a grounder that hit off pitcher Fernando Abad and caromed toward third baseman Josh Donaldson. Choo was originally called safe on a close play but the call was overturned after a challenge by Athletics manager Bob Melvin. It appeared that Choo landed awkwardly on the base while trying to beat the throw. Michael Choice took over in left field in the bottom of the inning.

Choo will likely get Tuesday and Wednesday off. The Rangers are off on Thursday so the best case scenario is likely to be Choo back in the lineup on Friday.

"We'll know tomorrow," manager Ron Washington said. "I just hope he comes back. We just have to wait and see what it shows tomorrow."

**Choice to get start against former team
By T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com | 4/21/2014 9:09 P.M. ET**

OAKLAND -- Rangers outfielder Michael Choice will get to face his old team on Tuesday as manager Ron Washington is planning to start him against Athletics left-hander Tommy Milone.

This will be Choice's sixth start in 21 games and they have all been against left-handed starters. He went into Monday 5-for-25 with one home run, but the Rangers are still comfortable Choice is getting enough playing time without hurting his development.

"I think I'm doing a great job of getting him playing time," Washington said. "With what we have, I'm doing my best to get him out there. If I can get him one or two starts a week, we can keep him sharp. Teams seem to want to throw lefties against us so he'll get his at-bats."

The Rangers acquired Choice and Minor League infielder Chris Bostick from the Athletics in the winter for pitcher Josh Lindblom and outfielder Craig Gentry. Choice was the Athletics' No. 1 draft pick in 2010 and the Rangers expect him to one day be an everyday player. But right now he has to adapt to being the fourth outfielder.

"I feel like I'm starting to adjust to the role, little by little," Choice said. "Your natural instinct is to want to be out there every day but I'm adjusting."

When Choice plays, it usually means designated hitter Mitch Moreland sits. Washington's job could get harder later this week when Adrian Beltre comes off the disabled list and returns to third base. Kevin Kouzmanoff, who was the American

League Player of the Week, has been playing well in Beltre's absence and, with Jim Adduci on the disabled list, he'll likely have to fill a similar role to Choice as a right-handed hitter off the bench.

"Certain guys are going to play and certain guys are going to have to wait," Washington said. "That's the makeup of the team. Kouzmanoff is a class act. It's not going to be an issue when Beltre returns. That's what his value is. He plays baseball no matter what the situation. He's been a godsend. To do what he's done, I don't know where we would be without him."

Harrison could return by Friday

OAKLAND -- Pitcher Matt Harrison could return to the Rangers' rotation as early as Friday against the Mariners.

Harrison threw a light bullpen session on Monday and is expected to throw a longer one on Tuesday. If that goes well, Harrison could start on Friday against the Mariners.

"We'll make a determination after he gets all his work in," manager Ron Washington said.

Harrison put himself in position to return with eight scoreless innings on Saturday in his third medical rehab start for Double-A Frisco. Harrison went into the game determined not only to get his work in and get his pitch-count up, but also to get better results than his two previous outings. He appeared to have succeeded in achieving his goal and not worrying about outside distractions like how much longer he would need before he got back to the big leagues.

"Before the innings started, I started thinking about that stuff and squashed it," Harrison said. "I went out there and was focused on each pitch and staying on the attack. It's amazing how your goals and focus can dictate the outcome of the game."

Harrison won 18 games for the Rangers in 2012 and was their Opening Day pitcher in 2013. But he was shut down after two starts because of a herniated disc in his lower back. He twice underwent surgery on April 23 and May 1 and did not return the rest of the year. He had an additional surgery on Sept. 9 on his right non-throwing shoulder to alleviate Thoracic Outlet Syndrome.

Fielder gets intentional record

OAKLAND -- Prince Fielder was walked intentionally again on Sunday for the eighth time this month. He is the first American League player to be intentionally walked that many times in April.

"I don't know ... I guess it's part of the job," Fielder said.

All eight intentional walks came on the last homestand. That means they all came while Adrian Beltre has been on the disabled list with a strained left quad muscle. Beltre is expected to come off the disabled list on Friday.

When Beltre was active, he batted cleanup behind Fielder. Since he has been gone, Fielder has hit fourth with Kevin Kouzmanoff hitting behind him. Kouzmanoff, hitting .366 going into Monday's game, has been hot but not enough to keep teams from walking Fielder.

"With Beltre in the lineup, they have to pick their poison," manager Ron Washington said. "With Fielder or Kouzmanoff, I'd throw to Kouz. But if I have to choose between Fielder and Beltre, I'd think a little bit."

Fielder went into Monday's game hitting .188 with two home runs, six RBIs and a .333 slugging percentage. But that hasn't deterred teams from pitching around him.

"Everybody knows Prince has not been Prince lately," Washington said. "But they know Prince can be Prince and with one swing of the bat, he can change the whole ballgame."

Fielder is unlikely to get the Major League record for intentional walks for April. Barry Bonds had 18 in 2004. Bonds holds the Major League record for any month as he was walked intentionally 23 times in June and September of 2004.

Worth noting

- Nick Tepesch is 3-1 with a 2.45 ERA and a 1.05 WHIP in four starts at Triple-A Round Rock, but the Rangers passed him up in choosing to start Nick Martinez on Tuesday against the Athletics. The Rangers want Tepesch to get extended

work at Round Rock, especially continuing his development of a changeup. Said manager Ron Washington, "He's in a place where he can take chances. You can't take chances up here."

- Double-A Frisco pitcher Luke Jackson was the Texas League Player of the Week while Yohander Mendez of Class A Hickory received that honor in the South Atlantic League.

- The Rangers have used the disabled list 11 times this season, the most in the Majors. They have 10 players currently on the disabled list, also the most in the Majors.

- Infielder Andy Parrino has been claimed off waivers by the Athletics and optioned to Triple-A Sacramento. The Rangers designated him for assignment last week to make room for pitcher Aaron Poreda on the 40-man roster. The Rangers claimed Parrino on waivers in Spring Training from the Athletics. Last year the Rangers and the Athletics swapped waiver claims on infielder Adam Rosales, who is currently at Triple-A Round Rock.

- Rangers infielder Luis Sardinas, 20, who made his Major League debut on Sunday with a single against the White Sox, is currently the youngest player in the Major Leagues.

FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

Rangers rally past Athletics to open three-game series

Posted Tuesday, Apr. 22, 2014

By Jeff Wilson

OAKLAND, Calif. — Yu Darvish's nemeses so far in his career have been the Oakland Athletics and those pillows he uses in spring training.

The A's, though, have been more annoying than any pain in the neck.

Their hitters, one through nine, seem to give Darvish fits by the way they extend at-bats or go against scouting reports or find a way to fend off his best pitches.

That didn't change Monday night at O.co Coliseum, where Darvish labored through six innings and logged 116 pitches only to receive a no-decision.

But he said that he is better equipped to face the A's this year than in the previous two, in which he posted a 1-6 record against the two-time defending American League West champions.

The results were better in his first start against them this season, and his ability to escape three A's threats early in the game gave the Texas Rangers enough time to rally to a 4-3 victory to open a three-game series.

Donnie Murphy provided the go-ahead hit in the eighth inning, driving in Kevin Kouzmanoff, and Joakim Soria stranded the tying run at second base in the ninth after a one-out error on Elvis Andrus.

Darvish, though, even while not at his best, found a way against the one team that gets under his skin.

"I think they are smart hitters, and they are able to make adjustments," Darvish said. "I know I haven't pitched well in this stadium. Compared to last year, I think I've matured mentally to battle teams like that. I think that I won't get frustrated or irritated, and I will focus on the batter in front of me."

Shin-Soo Choo started the game with a home run, but he would leave in the seventh inning after spraining his left ankle on a close play at first base in which he was initially called safe before the call was overturned after video review.

X-rays taken of the ankle were negative, and an MRI has been scheduled for Tuesday. Choo said that he feels pain when he runs, and manager Ron Washington expects to give Choo at least a day off Tuesday.

"I hit the bag too hard," Choo said. "I didn't know exactly what happened, but I felt very sore when I hit the bag. I talked to Wash. I didn't want to make it worse."

All three A's runs came in the second, an inning that Brandon Moss opened with a towering homer on Darvish's first pitch. Coco Crisp, who reached in his first four plate appearances, drove in two more with a two-out single to left.

The A's got Darvish for eight hits and four walks, but he prevented them from more by pitching out of trouble in the first, third and fourth innings.

Crisp opened the A's first with a single and quick steal of second, but Darvish stranded him at third.

In the third, Oakland had runners at second and third with one out, but Darvish got Alberto Callaspo for one of his six strikeouts and got Josh Reddick on a popup to shallow left field.

The A's loaded the bases with two outs in the fourth, but Darvish struck out Josh Donaldson on a slider in the dirt to end the threat. Darvish then retired seven of the final eight batters he faced.

"He beared down on us," Donaldson said. "I came up with the bases loaded one time, and he threw a pretty good slider for strike three. The guy's good, not just your run of the mill guy."

Darvish said that threw more changeups and curveballs later in the game after detecting that the A's were sitting on the slider with two strikes against him. But he was determined after the first three innings that he would pitch into the sixth even though his pitch count was at 91 after four and 102 after five.

"After the third inning, I told Wash, no matter how high the pitch count, I was going to pitch through six innings," Darvish said.

The Rangers' bullpen worked three scoreless innings, with Neal Cotts getting his first win of the season, but things got tight against Soria in the ninth after Andrus threw high and wide to first base and allowed Jed Lowrie to reach second with one out.

Soria, though, got Donaldson and Yoenis Cespedes to end it.

"Soria was real good," Washington said. "It could have come unraveled, but it didn't."

Down 3-1, the Rangers scored the game's final three runs. Prince Fielder started the fourth with a double and scored as Kouzmanoff, the AL Player of the Week, followed with a single to center.

In the fifth, Andrus and Alex Rios singled with two outs, and Fielder followed with a third straight base hit to plate Andrus and tie score.

"It seems like we've been executing at the right time lately," Murphy said. "When you do that, you're going to win ballgames."

Matt Harrison could pitch for Rangers this weekend

Posted Monday, Apr. 21, 2014

By Jeff Wilson

OAKLAND, Calif. — Matt Harrison threw a light bullpen session Monday at O.co Coliseum and will throw a more intense one Tuesday before pitching coach Mike Maddux and bullpen coach Andy Hawkins decide whether the left-hander will come off the disabled list this weekend at Seattle.

Harrison made his most impressive rehab start to date Saturday, allowing only three hits in eight scoreless innings for Double A Frisco. He logged 86 pitches and should be able to handle a 100-pitch workload.

"I feel like I'm there," said Harrison, who is trying to return from two back operations last season.

The Rangers, though, want to make sure that Harrison doesn't have any issues from recovering from his longest outing since 2012. He would likely start for Triple A Round Rock if he's asked to make another rehab start.

"He's just got to show if he can recover, and then it's up to Mike and Hawk to see if he slots," manager Ron Washington said.

No sports hate

Mike Napoli called his 2011 desire to beat his former team, the Los Angeles Angels, "sports hate." He remained friendly with many Angels players, but he badly wanted to beat the team that traded him away.

Michael Choice, though, didn't have the same motivation Monday as the Rangers faced off against Oakland, which traded him in December for outfielder Craig Gentry.

"I look at it as a good thing for me," said Choice, who is playing about 15 minutes from where he lives. "It'll be interesting being on the other side."

Choice said that he is satisfied with his performance as a bench player after getting regular at-bats in every previous season since turning pro after Oakland made him the 10th overall selection in the 2010 draft.

Manager Ron Washington agreed, and said that he will continue to get Choice a couple games a week against left-handers and some pinch-hitting opportunities. Choice will start Tuesday against A's lefty Tommy Millone.

Nick Martinez gets second chance with Rangers

Posted Monday, Apr. 21, 2014

By Jeff Wilson

OAKLAND, Calif. — The adoring Nick Martinez Fan Club that cheered his every move earlier this month during his major league debut won't have nearly the same number of representatives Tuesday for career start No. 2.

He estimated that 50 or 60 friends and family from his native Florida endured Tropicana Field. One aunt who lives in the Bay Area will brave the worst stadium in the game, O.co Coliseum.

"She won't be screaming," Martinez said.

Martinez might be screaming, or at least muttering, if he doesn't throw strikes. Quality strikes. And lots of them.

The Oakland A's make pitchers work. Just ask Yu Darvish. A pitcher coming off a five-walk game at Double A Frisco, as Martinez is, could be in for a short, miserable night if he can't command the strike zone.

That's his first task in his second spot start of the season for the Texas Rangers.

"The same things that apply to Double A are going to apply here," Martinez said Monday before the Rangers and A's opened a three-game series.

"Obviously, the mistakes you make up are probably going to be more damaging. But I'm going to try to pitch my game. I was walking too many guys down there [at Frisco]. I'm going to get back to what helped me get up here in the first place."

Martinez opened eyes April 5, when he allowed three runs in six innings at Tampa Bay and left with the lead in a game that the bullpen gave away in the eighth inning. The Rays connected for two homers to account for their runs against Martinez.

The two starts that followed for Martinez at Frisco, though, were nothing special. If anything, the five walks he allowed in 4 2/3 innings Thursday against Corpus Christi were a bit disconcerting.

Worry not, said Martinez. He was experimenting with a two-seam fastball and was having trouble throwing it for a strike. He will be featuring a four-seamer, a slider and a curveball against the A's, and maybe the sinker in the right situation.

"It'll be in the back pocket," Martinez said. "But it's pretty far down the depth chart."

Martinez, 23, appears to be first on the Rangers' depth chart of extra starters. There wasn't much talk about any other pitchers, namely fellow right-hander Nick Tepesch, coming up for the spot start that became necessary when Tanner Scheppers (elbow) hit the disabled list.

Tepesch, who opened 2013 as the Rangers' No. 5 starter, is working on a changeup at Triple A Round Rock. Though he has pitched well in three of his four starts, the Rangers want Tepesch to keep tinkering in the minors.

"He needs to stay down there and compete," manager Ron Washington said.

And Martinez, who has never pitched in the minors above Double A, needs to be competing in the minors, too, and will be once Matt Harrison is activated from the disabled list, possibly as soon as this weekend. Martinez knows that but isn't focused on it.

He needs to be focused on throwing strikes against an A's team that entered Monday ranked second in the American League in walks (86) and on-base percentage (.344). Martinez walked three Rays in his debut, and one scored on a two-run homer by Matt Joyce.

"Just go out there and throw his stuff and make them swing the bats," Washington said. "This team, you can't be putting on the base. They find a way to hurt you. That's all I want him to do: Just throw strikes."

Kevin Kouzmanoff calls weekly honor 'cool'
Posted Monday, Apr. 21, 2014
By Jeff Wilson

OAKLAND, Calif. — Third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff paused briefly Monday between stretching and preparing to hit in the batting cages to reflect on being named the American League Player of the Week.

"That's cool," he said before rushing off.

But Kouzmanoff returned to talk more about the honor, earned after leading the league in RBIs (eight) and total bases (20) over seven games last week. He tied for second in homers (two) and tied for third in hits (10) with a .690 slugging percentage that was fourth-best.

He was playing his first full week since ending a two-year drought without a big-league at-bat.

"It feels good to come back and have an impact," said Kouzmanoff, who batted .345 and had a 10-game hitting streak that was snapped Sunday. "It's not only me, but it's my teammates around me."

Playing time, though, could become scarce for Kouzmanoff when Adrian Beltre comes off the disabled list Friday. Manager Ron Washington said that he will try to keep Kouzmanoff engaged and likes the idea of having a player with Kouzmanoff's experience on the bench.

But Kouzmanoff's value the past two weeks hasn't been lost on Washington.

"He's been a Godsend to take over for Beltre and perform like that," Washington said. "He is a pro."

DALLAS MORNING NEWS

Yu Darvish (finally) gets early run support, but ace still struggling against Oakland
By EVAN GRANT | 22 April 2014 01:10 AM

OAKLAND, Calif. — Two significant things happened early in the Texas Rangers' game Monday.

The Rangers got Yu Darvish an early run, something they'd failed to do at any point while he was in the game during his first three starts. And, an inning later, Brandon Moss once again punished a Darvish pitch to neutralize any advantage the Rangers ace had.

Or in other words: The more some things change, the more others stay the same.

Even when the Rangers score for Darvish, he has trouble with Oakland.

Darvish, the Rangers' ace, took a 1-6 career record and 4.30 ERA against Oakland into the start. He had lost six consecutive decisions since winning his first one. For a team aiming to dislodge Oakland from the top of the AL West, those are disconcerting numbers.

"I don't know if we can set a tone this series, but yes, we want to get these games going and see where we stand," Rangers manager Ron Washington said before the game. "This is the team we judge ourselves by. Right now, they are the leader. We'd like to come up here and represent ourselves well, but it's not going to make or break our season if it doesn't go our way."

If things are to go the Rangers way this season, Darvish is going to have to find a way to beat Oakland. And to do that, he's going to have to figure out a way to pitch effectively or, at least, around Moss.

In each of his last four starts against Oakland, Moss has terrorized him early in the game.

On Monday, Darvish took a 1-0 lead to the second courtesy of a Shin-Soo Choo leadoff homer and Darvish's own ability to dance around trouble in the bottom of the inning. The Choo homer was the rarest of rarities for Darvish — a first inning lead. A year ago, the Rangers scored in the first inning seven times for Darvish. He responded by going 6-0 with a 2.52 ERA in those games. The Rangers won all seven.

But against Oakland, all of Darvish's trends — except the bad ones — seem to go out the window.

And it all starts with Moss.

In his last three starts against Oakland, dating back to June of 2013, Moss delivered a big hit early in the game to put Darvish in a bind. On each occasion, either the Rangers' offense failed to respond or Darvish simply folded.

In the previous three outings, though, Darvish had relied heavily on his cut fastball, a pitch he's all but pocketed this season. Last September 14, Moss doubled with two outs on a first-inning cutter to score Josh Donaldson, who walked. That was all the offense in the game.

Ten days earlier, Moss hit a two-run, two-out homer in the first inning to start an 11-4 rout. It also came on a cutter, which runs into the left-handed hitting Moss.

And in June, Moss had led off the second inning with a homer on a flat fastball after watching a cutter for a strike. Oakland went on to score five runs against Darvish in six innings in a 6-2 win.

Darvish had announced that he was well aware of Oakland's approach against him before Monday's start.

"I know what their strategy against me is. I just have to figure it out from there," Darvish said. "I just have to see how I feel that day and make adjustments and see how their approach is against me in the first two innings."

On Monday, Darvish threw 20 pitches in the first inning, and Moss apparently took note. The scouting report on Darvish that is quickly developing is that he's more willing to attack with the fastball early in the count this season. So when Darvish delivered something up in the zone, Moss, who virtually stands on top of the plate, attacked it himself and drove it just over the fence in right to tie the game.

Darvish then walked No. 7 hitter Josh Reddick and allowed back-to-back two-out hits to Eric Sogard and Coco Crisp. The latter put Darvish behind, 3-1.

The more things change when it comes to Darvish and Oakland, the more they stay the same.

Rangers' depth shines as Kevin Kouzmanoff is A.L. player of the week

By: STAFF | 3:01 pm on April 21, 2014

Kevin Kouzmanoff has big shoes to fill at third base while Adrian Beltre is on the disabled list, but he has filled them more than ably in his first full week on the job.

On Monday he was named the American League's Player of the Week.

Kouzmanoff was 10-for-29 (.345) last week and led the league in RBIs (eight) and total bases (20). He also tied for the league lead in doubles (four) and runs scored (six). Kouzmanoff had his 10-game hitting streak snapped Sunday.

"It feels good to come back and have an impact on a team," said Kouzmanoff, who had not played in the majors since appearing in 27 games for Colorado in 2011 before the Rangers added him when Beltre went on the disabled list. "I think we are playing together as a team and we've played well. It's just been a good week."

Said Rangers manager Ron Washington: "He's been a godsend in Beltre's absence. I think in his career, he's had a stretch like this. Do we expect him to hit .366, or whatever he has hit, all year? Come on.

"But he's a pro. He's had every role a guy could have. There is no situation he has not been in. That's important experience. That's experience you like to have on your bench. It's not going to be an issue for us when Beltre returns. I don't know where we'd be without him."

Michael Choice to get first start against old team Tuesday **By Evan Grant | 9:29 pm on April 21, 2014**

Texas outfielder Michael Choice throws his bat away after coaxing a walk in the fourth inning during the Chicago White Sox vs. the Texas Rangers major league baseball game at Globe Life Park in Arlington on Saturday, April 19, 2014. (Louis DeLuca/Dallas Morning News)

Michael Choice, Oakland's first-round pick in the 2010 draft, will get his first start as an opposing player at the O.Co Coliseum Tuesday when the A's start lefty Tommy Milone against the Rangers.

The starts have been infrequent so far for the star of the Rangers' spring training. It will be only his sixth start in the first 21 games. Choice is hitting .200 for 25 at-bats this season. And it's possible his role could shrink further when Beltre returns with Kouzmanoff potentially getting some of the DH at-bats against left-handed pitching.

Washington said he hasn't considered how he'll divide playing time, but indicated that he's not likely to make a major change with Choice.

"You look at our roster and what we have right now, and I think I'm doing a great job, no fantastic job, of working him in," Washington said. "It's not going to change my approach to our team. There are certain guys who are going to play and certain guys who are going to have to wait until I can find a spot for them."

Choice acknowledged that he has struggled to keep his timing through the intermittent playing time.

"There are some days that are tougher than others," Choice said. "Some days I feel like I've been in there. Some days I don't. I'm trying to find that consistency so that it feels the same every day."

'More mature' Yu Darvish battles through six innings to keep Rangers in position for 4-3 win **By Evan Grant | 1:48 am on April 22, 2014**

OAKLAND, Calif. – For the seventh straight start against Oakland, Texas Rangers starter Yu Darvish did not leave the game as a winner.

But he may have left Monday in better position to tackle the A's going forward.

Darvish overcame early command problems and a high pitch count to stick around through six innings, long enough for the Rangers to come back and tie the game on the way to a 4-3 win.

"Compared to last year, I think I've matured mentally to battle through these kinds of games," Darvish said through an interpreter. "I've decided that I would not get frustrated or irritated and I would focus on the hitter in front of me."

That was especially important for Darvish early on Monday as he lost an early lead on a home run by arch-nemesis Brandon Moss, then fell behind by allowing a pair of two-out hits. And though he battled, his pitch count rose to 91 after four innings. It seemed unlikely he'd get through more than five innings.

He started throwing more changeups and curveballs and veering away slightly from the fastball-first approach he used through his first three starts of 2014 and finally got the A's off balance. It led to an 11-pitch fifth inning and, somewhat surprisingly, a sixth. He needed only 15 more pitches to get through the sixth.

"I'm kind of surprised that I was able to get through the sixth, but after the third, even though my pitch count was so high, I told [manager Ron Washington] that no matter how high it was, I was going to get through six innings," Darvish said. "They are smart hitters and they have a good approach and are able to make adjustments."

"This game is a game of adjustments," Washington said. "He settled down and started making some pitches. He bent but didn't break. He was good enough to keep us in the game. He quit throwing so many first pitch fastballs. They knew he was lighting up the strike zone with first-pitch fastballs, so he changed the pattern on them. That's what the game is

adjustment and re-adjustment, adjustment and re-adjustment and if you can't adjust you don't last. He adjusted, which is why he lasted."

Perhaps the best example of the adjustments were Darvish's at-bats against Brandon Moss, who entered the game with three homers against Darvish. Moss had big hits in the first at-bat of the final three games in which he faced Darvish in 2013. Each of those hits in an at-bat that began with a cut fastball and included only a fastball (if there was another pitch at all) were keys to Darvish's losses.

On Monday, Moss got a first-pitch fastball to start the second inning and drove it into the first row of right field seats to tie up the game. In the next two at-bats Darvish, as Washington noted, "changed the pattern."

With two on and nobody out in the third, Darvish got Moss on a first-pitch cutter than perhaps moved in on him a little too much. Instead of lifting the ball, he grounded to first base. In the fifth, Darvish started him with a slow curve, then threw a splitter and then got him to ground to short on another cutter.

"It is what it is," Darvish said of his battle with Moss, who is 6-for-18 against him now with four home runs. "He's hit a lot of pitches that I didn't think were hittable. His approach was kind of different than what we talked about in our meetings."

Darvish figured it out quickly enough on Monday and kept himself – and the Rangers – in the game.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Recap: Choo hits solo HR, Rangers bullpen pitches scoreless three innings, beat A's 4-3 21 April 2014 09:05 PM

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — A day after a 14-run defeat, the Texas Rangers rallied from three runs down against the defending division champions.

Manager Ron Washington expects to know plenty about his club following this early test facing Oakland.

Donnie Murphy lined a go-ahead single up the middle with one out in the eighth inning, and the Rangers came from behind to beat the Athletics 4-3 on Monday night.

"They're the division champs, it goes through them," Washington said.

Sean Doolittle (0-1) allowed a leadoff double to Kevin Kouzmanoff and Mitch Moreland sacrificed him to third before Murphy's hit. Murphy and Kouzmanoff are both former A's players.

Neal Cotts (1-1) pitched one inning for the win, then gave way to Alexi Ogando before Joakim Soria finished for his fourth save.

Brandon Moss homered and Coco Crisp hit a two-run single as the A's went ahead 3-0 in the second, but they couldn't hold the lead.

Oakland swept a weekend series against Houston and lost for only the second time in nine games and third time in 14.

"I don't think too many times you'll see Doolittle give it up," Washington said. "He's only human."

Kouzmanoff also singled in a run for the Rangers, who had their season-best five-game winning streak snapped in Sunday's 16-2 home loss to the White Sox.

Yu Darvish needed 29 pitches to get through the second inning, when he allowed Moss' leadoff homer and the single by Crisp. Darvish allowed three runs on eight hits in six innings, struck out six and walked four on 116 pitches.

"I'm kind of surprised I was able to pitch through the sixth inning," he said. "After the third, I told Wash that no matter the pitch count I was going to pitch through six innings."

The right-hander hasn't beaten Oakland since May 16, 2012, and is still looking for his first victory at the Coliseum — one of three ballparks where he has multiple losses. Darvish is 0-6 in his last seven starts against the A's. He saw the end of his streak of eight straight outings allowing two or fewer runs, dating to last season.

Shin-Soo Choo led off the game with a home run. He later left the game in the seventh after landing awkwardly on his left ankle extending his leg to beat out what was ruled an infield single. X-rays were negative, but Choo was expected to have an MRI exam Tuesday to determine the severity of his sprain.

"We have a long season, it's April," Choo said. "I don't want to make it worse."

A's manager Bob Melvin challenged the call that Choo was safe, and it was then overturned in 3 minutes, 45 seconds, on review.

"I heard that he was out. Based on the replay I was seeing I wasn't sure about it but they said that there was one replay that showed that he was out," Melvin said. "That was one I challenge either way."

Oakland starter Dan Straily struck out six in five innings, but left with a no-decision after the Rangers tied the game at 3 on Prince Fielder's RBI single in the top of the fifth.

Crisp landed hard on his ribcage trying to make a diving catch in the sixth, but stayed in center field after a trainer and Melvin hustled out to check on him. Crisp singled for his third hit in the bottom half, then made a leaping catch in the seventh.

A's left fielder Yoenis Cespedes was held out of the starting lineup with a sore heel, though he reported feeling better. Cespedes flied out to the warning track in center as a pinch-hitter in the seventh then stayed in the game as left fielder.

NOTES: Crisp stole his 146th base for with the A's, tying him with Carney Lansford for fourth place in Oakland history. ... Rangers LHP Matt Harrison threw a bullpen and is scheduled for another Tuesday before being re-evaluated. He is recovering from back surgery — and the hope is he could make his season debut and first start in more than a year this weekend at Seattle. ... Former A's prospect Michael Choice, traded during the offseason, entered on defense for Choo in the seventh and singled and stole a base in the ninth. ... Oakland claimed INF Andy Parrino off waivers from Texas and optioned him to Triple-A Sacramento. ... Texas improved to 6-2 against the AL West.

ESPN DALLAS

Rapid Reaction: Rangers 4, A's 3

By Eric Gilmore | April 22, 2014, 12:57 AM CT

OAKLAND, Calif. -- The Texas Rangers overcame an early 3-1 deficit to defeat the Oakland A's 4-3 Monday night in the opener of a three-game series against the two-time defending American League West champions.

Rangers third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff hit a leadoff double in the eighth against his former team, moved to third on Mitch Moreland's sacrifice bunt and scored on Donnie Murphy's sharp single to center, giving Texas a 4-3 lead.

Another no-decision: Right-hander Yu Darvish gave up three runs on eight hits over six innings and received his third straight no-decision. Considering his past luck against Oakland, Darvish can't complain. Darvish entered the game 1-6 with a 4.30 ERA in seven career starts against the A's. He was 0-2 with a 9.58 ERA in two career starts at the O.co Coliseum.

One bad inning: Darvish gave up three runs in the third inning, allowing a leadoff homer to Brandon Moss, a double to Eric Sogard and a two-run single to Coco Crisp. He had 48 pitches through two innings. Darvish stranded two baserunners in the third and escaped a two-out, bases-loaded jam in the fourth, striking out A's third baseman Josh Donaldson.

What a relief: Jason Frasor, Neal Cotts, Alexi Ogando and Joakim Soria combined to blank the A's over the final three innings. Soria got the save and Cotts the victory. With one out in the ninth, A's shortstop Jed Lowrie reached second on shortstop Elvis Andrus' two-base throwing error, but Soria retired Donaldson on a fly ball to center and Yoenis Cespedes on a fly ball to left.

Deep thoughts: Rangers left-fielder Shin-Soo Choo led off the game with a home run. It was Choo's 12th career leadoff home run and his first of the season. Choo, acquired as a free agent in December, drilled right-hander Dan Straily's 2-2 pitch over the right-field wall for his second homer of the season.

In support of Darvish: In his first three starts, Darvish allowed just two runs over 22.0 innings but went 1-0 with two no-decisions and never threw a pitch with a Rangers run on the scoreboard. His only two runs of support came in the top half

of an inning before he left the game for a reliever. Choo ended that streak with his leadoff homer, and the Rangers added a run in the fourth and one in the fifth. That marked a season-high three runs of support for Darvish.

More signs of life: First baseman Prince Fielder went 2-for-4 with a double, drove in a run and scored a run as he continued fighting his way out of a slump. In the fifth inning with two out and runners at first and third, Fielder lined an RBI single to right, snapping an 0-for-9 skid with runners in scoring position.

No answer for Moss: Moss sent Darvish's first pitch in the second inning -- a belt-high fastball -- high and deep over the right-field wall for a home run. Moss homering off Darvish came as no surprise. He entered the game 5-for-15 with three home runs and five RBIs against Darvish. Now he has four career home runs off Darvish, tying the Angels' Mike Trout for the most by any opposing hitter.

After further review: In the top of the seventh, Choo beat out a ground ball for a single off left-hander Fernando Abad, but the call was overturned after a video review. To make matters worse, Choo hurt his left ankle when he landed hard on the bag. During the review, he went to the dugout and had his ankle taped, but he was replaced in the bottom of the seventh by former A's outfielder Michael Choice, who singled and stole second in the ninth.

Andrus' tough luck: Andrus singled and scored in the fifth inning and has now hit safely in 18 of 20 games to start the season. He also lined out to left field in the third and was robbed of extra bases in the seventh when A's center fielder Crisp made a leaping catch of Andrus' drive to left center. If the ball had eluded Crisp, Andrus might have had an inside-the-park home run.

Up next: Rangers rookie right-hander Nick Martinez (0-0, 4.50 ERA) will make his second career start Tuesday night in Game 2 of the three-game series. He'll face A's left-hander Tommy Milone (0-1, 4.09). First pitch is scheduled for 9:05 p.m. on ESPN 103.3 FM and Fox Sports Southwest.

Rangers answer bell in opener vs. A's **By Eric Gilmore | April 22, 2014, 2:51 AM CT**

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Texas Rangers manager Ron Washington wanted to see how his team measured up Monday against the two-time defending American League West champion Oakland Athletics in their first meeting of the season.

The Rangers stood tall, overcoming an early 3-1 hole to beat the A's 4-3, but their victory might have come with a cost -- left fielder Shin-Soo Choo did not return to the field in the bottom of the seventh after suffering an ankle injury trying to beat out an infield single in the top of the inning.

Other than Choo's ailment -- which could force him to miss at least one game for a Texas team already beset by injury -- Washington liked most of what he saw from the Rangers against the A's, particularly the way they battled back to win the opener after falling behind by two runs in the second inning.

"You want to try to win the first one," Washington said. "I think we battle these guys pretty tough, but they've always found a way to pull it out on us. Tonight is just one ballgame. We got to come back tomorrow and we got to play just as well tomorrow as we did today. They're the division champs. It goes through them."

A pair of former A's -- third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff and second baseman Donnie Murphy -- teamed up to produce the go-ahead run in the eighth inning, snapping a 3-3 tie.

Kouzmanoff, the reigning American League Player of the Week, led off with a double off the right-center wall against A's left-hander Sean Doolittle. First baseman Mitch Moreland moved Kouzmanoff to third with a sacrifice bunt, getting it down with two strikes. Then Murphy singled sharply to center off the hard-throwing Doolittle, bringing Kouzmanoff home.

"Every time you play Oakland you always know it's going to be a good series," Murphy said. "They're the top dog in the division right now, even though it's early. It's always nice to come in here and get that first win of the series. And to come from behind and take it from them, it was a good feeling."

Right-hander Yu Darvish wasn't at his best, but after giving up three runs in the second inning, he blanked the A's for the next four frames, escaping serious trouble twice. Darvish entered the game with a 1-6 career record against Oakland but got a no-decision. He said he has learned not to let his emotions derail him against the A's.

"I don't really have good numbers in this stadium, but compared to last year I think I've matured mentally to battle these situations," Darvish said. "I decided I would not get frustrated and irritated and I would focus on the hitter."

Shin-Soo Choo to have MRI on ankle

By Eric Gilmore | April 22, 2014, 6:39 AM ET

Left fielder Shin-Soo Choo left Monday's game with a sprained ankle after trying to beat out an infield single in the top of the seventh inning. According to Choo, X-rays were negative, but he'll have an MRI as early as Tuesday and will likely miss at least one game and possibly more.

The Rangers already have 10 players on a disabled list that's seemed longer than a 19-inning game this season.

"I hit the bag. It felt sore so I just came out of the game," Choo said. "I don't want to make it worse."

With A's left-hander Tommy Milone starting Tuesday's game, outfielder Michael Choice was already slated to be in the lineup, and Choo might well have had the day off anyway. Now he'll definitely rest his ankle on Tuesday.

"A long season," Choo said. "I don't want to make it worse. Probably playoffs it would be a different story, but in the season we've got a long ways to go. So I don't want to make it worse."

Choo hit a leadoff home run in the first inning -- his 12th career leadoff homer and first as a Ranger -- walked in the third and had what was initially ruled to be an infield single in the ninth. But after a video review, the call was overturned, and Choo was out. Trainers taped his ankle during the break, but Choice replaced him in left field in the bottom of the seventh.

"We'll know more tomorrow," manager Ron Washington said.

'Godsend' Kouzmanoff get his due

By Eric Gilmore | April 21, 2014, 8:38 PM CT

OAKLAND, Calif. -- When the Texas Rangers called up third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff from Triple-A Round Rock, they hoped he'd be a solid fill-in for the injured Adrian Beltre.

No one saw this coming.

Kouzmanoff was named the American League Player of the Week on Monday after putting up some stunning numbers over a seven-game span.

Kouzmanoff batted .345 (10-for-29) with two home runs, four doubles and eight RBIs last week. Only two Rangers received the award last season: Beltre (July 7) and outfielder Alex Rios (Sept. 29).

"He's been a godsend to take over for Beltre and do what he's done in his absence," Rangers manager Ron Washington said of Kouzmanoff before Monday night's game against the Oakland Athletics. "I don't know where we'd be without him."

Kouzmanoff is a .257 career hitter with 87 home runs in 683 games. He's on his fifth major league team and hadn't played in the big leagues since 2011 with the Colorado Rockies before being called up by Texas. In 11 games with the Rangers, Kouzmanoff is batting .366 with five doubles, two home runs and nine RBIs.

"It feels good to come back and have an impact," Kouzmanoff said. "I feel like we've been on a good stretch, but it's not only me. It's my teammates around me. I think we've been putting it together lately as a team, we've been stringing hits together, we've been pitching well, we've been playing defense, all those things. When we do them well we win ballgames."

Kouzmanoff hit a career-high 23 home runs with 84 RBIs in 2008 with the San Diego Padres. He had 18 homers and a career-high 88 RBIs the next year with San Diego. In 2010, he had 16 home runs and 71 RBIs with the A's, who traded him during the 2011 season to Colorado.

Kouzmanoff said he "thought it was pretty cool" when heard he had won the AL Player of the Week award.

"I've been getting good pitches to hit and I've been hitting them hard. Sometimes you don't hit those and other times you do," Kouzmanoff said. "It's just been a good week. It feels good and it feels good to be recognized for it."

Oakland homecoming: Rangers outfielder Michael Choice will be in the lineup Tuesday night against Oakland and start against his former team for the first time since being traded to Texas in December, Washington said. Choice has been getting consistent playing time against left-handers, and A's lefty Tommy Milone is scheduled to start.

"There's always going to be that first memory of where I broke into the big leagues," Choice said. "It will be interesting to be on the other side."

Choice is batting .200 (5-for-25) with one home run and three RBIs in 14 games. He's had to adjust to being a part-time player after playing every day in the minor leagues and his entire amateur career.

"I feel OK," Choice said. "I feel like I'm starting to get adjusted to the role better and better each day. Obviously the natural instinct for anybody is to want to be out there, but I just have to prepare every day to make sure I'm ready whenever I go in."

Washington said he didn't know whether Choice would start at designated hitter or in the outfield -- he has started at all three spots there.

The A's drafted Choice with the 10th overall pick in 2010 out of the University of Texas-Arlington. He made his major league debut last season with Oakland, hitting .278 with one double in nine games.

The A's traded Choice and infielder Chris Bostick to Texas for outfielder Craig Gentry and right-hander Josh Lindblom on Dec. 3.

Choice said he has no hard feelings over being traded. The A's, after all, sent him to his hometown team.

"I look at it as a good thing for me," Choice said. "Being able to play for the team I grew up watching is definitely more enjoyable."

Harrison watch: Left-hander Matt Harrison said he feels ready to come off the disabled list and rejoin the rotation, but the Rangers want to wait at least one more day to make that decision, according to Washington.

Harrison, who underwent surgery in April 2013 to repair a herniated disk in his lower back, allowed just three hits over eight innings with one walk and five strikeouts in a rehab start for Double-A Frisco on Saturday. He's with the Rangers for their road trip so that pitching coach Mike Maddux and bullpen coach Andy Hawkins can see first-hand how he recovers from his latest start.

Harrison was scheduled to throw short bullpen sessions Monday and Tuesday. After that, the Rangers will likely decide whether to slot him into the rotation or have him make another rehab start, Washington said.

"They're happy that I was able to turn things around and go out and pitch like I was supposed to," Harrison said. "They said see how you recover and be here with the guys and be in front of Mike and Hawk. ... See how I recover in front of their eyes and go from there."

Harrison hasn't started a game since April 6, 2013, against the Angels, but he said he feels ready to make his return.

"I feel like I'm there," Harrison said.

Return to sender: Infielder Andy Parrino, who was designated for assignment Friday, was claimed off waivers by Oakland on Monday and sent to Triple-A Sacramento. The Rangers claimed Parrino off waivers from the A's on March 3, then optioned him to Triple-A Round Rock. He hit .189 with three doubles and five RBIs in 13 games with Round Rock before being designated for assignment April 18.

Extra Bases: Martinez set for second start By Eric Gilmore | April 22, 2014, 7:45 AM CT

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Texas Rangers rookie right-hander Nick Martinez is expected to be officially recalled from Double-A Frisco and make his second career start Tuesday night against the Oakland Athletics.

Martinez made his major league debut April 5 against Tampa Bay, allowing just three runs and four hits over six innings and getting a no-decision in a 5-4 Rangers loss. The next day, Martinez was optioned to Frisco when right-hander Yu Darvish came off the disabled list.

Martinez is filling in for injured right-hander Tanner Scheppers, who's on the 15-day disabled list with right elbow inflammation. With left-hander Matt Harrison likely nearing a return from the disabled list, Martinez could be headed back to the minors soon after Tuesday night's game.

That's not his mindset.

"I look at it as an opportunity," Martinez said Monday before the Rangers opened a three-game series with a 4-3 victory against the A's. "It is an opportunity, after all. If they think I'm that guy, who's to say I don't stay up here? If I do go back down, I'll continue to work hard and help whichever team I'm with to win."

Martinez made two starts for Frisco, going 0-0 with a 1.86 ERA.

"I tried implementing a two-seamer down in Double-A, but scratch that," Martinez said, laughing. "I scratched the two-seamer. Walking too many guys down there. I kind of got away from my game plan. Plan to get back to what I normally do, which helped me get up here in the first place."

The Rangers selected Martinez in the 18th round of the 2011 June draft out of Fordham University, and he made a quick trip to the big leagues. He learned a few valuable lessons in his first major league start.

"It's the same game," Martinez said. "Just got to execute. The same things that apply at Double-A will apply here. Obviously the mistakes you make up here are probably going to be more damaging. It's the same game. I'm going to try to pitch my game."

Two of the four hits he allowed against Tampa Bay were home runs.

"Homers happen," Martinez said. "Just mistakes. I'm sure if I make mistakes in Double-A they're going to capitalize. I didn't really read too much into the homers."

FOX SPORTS SOUTHWEST

Kouzmanoff tabbed AL Player of the Week

Anthony Andro

APR 21, 2014 6:10p ET

Kevin Kouzmanoff has certainly softened the blow of the loss of Adrian Beltre and the rest of the American League has taken notice.

Kouzmanoff was named the AL player of the week Monday for his work last week.

Kouzmanoff had eight RBI and 20 total bases for the Rangers last week while tying for the league lead in runs scored (six) and doubles. He also batted .345 for the week and swatted two homers to nab a share of the team lead. Kouzmanoff has played in 11 games with the Rangers since Beltre got hurt and opened his Texas career with a 10-game hitting streak, one shy of the club record to start a Rangers' career.

Kouzmanoff is the first weekly winner for the Rangers this year. The last Texas player to nab a league award was Alex Rios, who was the AL player of the week in September last year.

The honors for Texas didn't stop with the big-league club Monday either. Frisco pitcher Luke Jackson was tabbed the Texas League pitcher of the week.

AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN

PCL: Iowa pitching stifles Express for 5-1 win

By Staff | 9:37 p.m. Monday, April 21, 2014

Iowa's Kyle Hendricks gave up only two hits in six innings of a 5-1 win over the Round Rock Express on Monday in Des Moines, Iowa.

It was the first loss against the Cubs (9-9) on the road trip; Round Rock (10-8) won 12-2 Saturday and 6-0 Sunday. Round Rock is 5-5 on the 11-game trip and will play one more in Des Moines at noon Tuesday.

Hendricks had six strikeouts with two walks. Yoanner Negrin and Brian Schlitter closed the game for the Cubs, holdings the Express to two hits in the final three innings.

Arismendy Alcantara's leadoff homer in the fourth put the Cubs ahead, and Matt Szczur's RBI single in the fifth gave Iowa a two-run lead. The Cubs scored three off Express reliever Ben Rowen in the eighth to push the margin to 5-0.

Round Rock scored in the ninth on Brett Nicholas' single that drove in Bryan Petersen, who led off the inning with a double.

The Express will return home for a four-game series against the Memphis Redbirds starting at 7 p.m. Thursday at Dell Diamond.

MILB.COM

Pitchers of the Week

For the week ending April 20

By Sam Dykstra / 04/21/2014 4:30 PM ET

Here's a look at the top pitching performers in each league for the week ending April 20:

International League

Greg Smith, Lehigh Valley

(1-0, 0.00 ERA, 1 G, 1 GS, 1 CG, 1 SHO, 7 IP, 4 H, 0 R, 0 ER, 0 HR, 0 HBP, 0 BB, 6 K)

The 30-year-old left-hander hadn't thrown a complete-game shutout at any level of the Minors since he tossed two for Class A Advanced Lancaster all the way back in 2006, but that's just what he accomplished in the first game of a doubleheader against Syracuse last Thursday. Smith, who is spending his second straight season in the Phillies system, also captured the IL Pitcher of the Week award last July. He is 1-0 with three runs and nine hits allowed to go with nine strikeouts and three walks in his first starts (11 2/3 innings) of 2014.

Pacific Coast League

Brian Flynn, New Orleans

(1-0, 0.00 ERA, 1 G, 1 GS, 7 IP, 1 H, 0 R, 0 ER, 0 HR, 0 HBP, 1 BB, 7 K)

After giving up eight earned runs on 10 hits and three walks in 4 1/3 innings in his second start of the season, the Marlins' No. 7 prospect has bounced back nicely, as shown by his seven-inning, one-hit gem last Friday. Flynn owned a 2.80 ERA to go with 122 strikeouts in 138 innings in the PCL last season and is off to a promising start with a 3.86 ERA (inflated by the eight-run outing) and 22 strikeouts in 23 1/3 innings thus far. "[W]ith me having the year I had here last year, I especially want to set the table for us," he told MiLB.com. "I want to get us on the right track."

Eastern League

Bryan Mitchell, Trenton

(1-0, 0.00 ERA, 1 G, 1 GS, 6 IP, 4 H, 0 R, 0 ER, 0 HR, 0 HBP, 2 BB, 12 K)

Like Flynn, Mitchell's 2014 didn't get off to a great start with the right-hander, who turned 23 on Saturday, giving up eight combined earned runs over his first two starts. The third outing seemed to be the charm, however, as Mitchell told MiLB.com that an improved front side of his delivery helped him strike out 12 in a six-inning gem against Akron. The Yankees liked enough of what they saw to call Mitchell up to the Majors on an emergency basis Sunday. He was not used and was sent back down to Trenton on Monday.

Southern League

Andrew Heaney, Jacksonville

(1-0, 0.69 ERA, 2 G, 2 GS, 13 IP, 4 H, 1 R, 1 ER, 0 HR, 0 HBP, 1 BB, 14 K)

Heaney makes it two Marlins hurlers on this list with his first award of the 2014 season. The 22-year-old showed some of what makes him the top left-handed pitching prospect in the game, according to MLB.com, with a pair of stellar outings last week. The greater of the two came Tuesday, when he served up just one hit and one walk to go with five strikeouts in six scoreless innings against Chattanooga. Heaney's 25 strikeouts this season are good to place him in a tie for first in the Southern League while his 0.86 WHIP ranks fifth.

Texas League

Luke Jackson, Frisco

(1-0, 0.00 ERA, 1 G, 1 GS, 6 IP, 3 H, 0 R, 0 ER, 0 HR, 0 HBP, 2 BB, 8 K)

Jackson toasted the Texas League with a 0.68 ERA across four starts in 2013, and it looks like he's finding that form again for the RoughRiders. In fact, his eight strikeouts against Arkansas last Tuesday are his most since July 22, 2013, with Class A Advanced Myrtle Beach. The Rangers' No. 8 prospect hasn't allowed a run in two of his three starts this season but owns a 4.40 ERA due to a seven-run, 3 1/3-inning outing on April 10.

California League

Ben Lively, Bakersfield

(1-0, 0.00 ERA, 1 G, 1 GS, 6 IP, 2 H, 0 R, 0 ER, 0 HR, 0 HBP, 0 BB, 10 K)

The Reds' No. 13 prospect is living up to his surname so far in the Cal League. The 2013 fourth-round pick out of the University of Central Florida leads the Class A Advanced circuit with a 0.53 ERA through three starts (17 innings). He also ranks in a tie for second with 23 strikeouts. His most impressive stat, though, might be the zero that corresponds to his walk total. Not bad for a right-hander whose only goals are "a low number of losses and a low ERA."

Carolina League

Brian Johnson, Salem

(1-0, 0.00 ERA, 1 G, 1 GS, 6 IP, 0 H, 0 R, 0 ER, 0 HR, 0 HBP, 0 BB, 5 K)

It doesn't get much better than perfect. Well, in the case of Johnson, maybe healthy and perfect is an even better combination. The 31st overall pick in the 2012 Draft, Johnson was hurt by a line drive to the face in 2012 and then battled a shoulder injury that limited him to 85 innings in 2013. He got off to a rough start this season with 11 earned runs in his first three starts (13 2/3 innings), but going 18 up, 18 down last Friday has him back on the correct course. "The first thing I want is to get over 100 innings, get over that hill," Johnson told MiLB.com. "Build up some arm strength and the results will take care of themselves. I'm just going to work hard as I can, give it all and, hopefully, everything will fall into place." Johnson throws six perfect innings

Florida State League

Jed Bradley, Brevard County

(1-0, 0.00 ERA, 1 G, 1 GS, 6 IP, 2 H, 0 R, 0 ER, 0 HR, 0 HBP, 0 BB, 5 K)

Bradley is spending his third straight season with the Manatees, but this is his first FSL Pitcher of the Week award. That's no accident. Wednesday's stellar showing was his first scoreless start since May 5, 2013. After going 4-4 with a 4.14 ERA in 16 starts for the Manatees last year -- he didn't start after July 19 due to shoulder concerns -- Bradley is off to a 2-1 start with a 4.70 ERA in three starts so far. His control has been much improved in the early going with only two walks issued in 15 1/3 innings.

Midwest League

Kendall Graveman, Lansing

(1-0, 0.00 ERA, 1 G, 1 GS, 8 1/3 IP, 1 H, 0 R, 0 ER, 0 HR, 0 HBP, 1 BB, 7 K)

Oftentimes, Minor League pitchers pursuing no-hitters fall victim to pitch counts and innings limits and are forced to exit before they can see their feat out. That wasn't the case with Graveman, who took a no-hitter all the way to the ninth against Belit on Friday. He served up a one-out infield single to Jose Chavez, and that was that on what could have been his first no-no ever. "You get so close and you almost taste it and you want to have it, but sometimes it doesn't happen and then you have to move on," Graveman told MiLB.com. The 23-year-old right-hander leads the Midwest League with a 0.59 WHIP and is second with a 0.44 ERA.

South Atlantic League

Yohander Mendez, Hickory

(1-0, 0.00 ERA, 1 G, 1 GS, 6 IP, 2 H, 0 R, 0 ER, 0 HR, 0 HBP, 0 BB, 10 K)

With a rate of 6.2 K/9 in 2013, Mendez wasn't exactly known as a big strikeout pitcher entering the 2014 season. He might have changed that perception with 10 big punchouts against Asheville on Friday. Before hitting double digits last week, the Rangers left-hander's career high was seven, set on July 19, 2012, in the Dominican Summer League. Mendez ranks fourth in the Sally League with a 1.17 ERA through four appearances.