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Shawn Windsor: Detroit Tigers' pitching will be fine, but lineup's weak spots starting to show

May 27, 2014

By Shawn Windsor/ Detroit Free Press

Brad Ausmus isn't going to panic.

I don't blame him.

As for you?

Well, 10-0 shutouts aren't pretty, especially when they arrive after a 12-2 loss and a 12-4 loss. Not that anyone is counting, but that means the Tigers have now given up 34 runs in three days.

You want more?

How about 45 runs in the last five days? Or 56 runs in the last six days?

No wonder the Tigers aren't winning. In fact, they're getting their butts kicked.

The question is, what does it mean?

"We aren't pitching well," Ausmus said.

No, no, I mean, what does this really mean? This streak of seven losses in eight games?

Maybe ... nothing. After all, this is baseball, right?

And as Ausmus said after the loss to Oakland Monday afternoon, that means his team gets to play 162 games, and that his team has had only one bad week, and that it's neither fair nor prudent to speculate what one bad week forecasts.

I'll buy that logic, to a point.

Ausmus is right to remind us — as he did Monday — that his pitching staff is one of the best in baseball and that his staff will not keep giving up 10 or more runs every day. Where we disagree is when he said the offense will be fine.

That is less certain.

Miguel Cabrera and Victor Martinez are as good a combo as there is in baseball. Ian Kinsler is playing the best ball of his career. But name another hitter in this lineup trending in the right direction?

Austin Jackson? Torii Hunter? Alex Avila? Rajai Davis? Nick Castellanos?

OK, Andrew Romine. He is not a .180 hitter. But he isn't a .280 hitter, either.

Until we see otherwise, Jackson has proven to be a very good centerfielder with occasional power. He isn't striking out as much as he did a year ago, but he's hitting .258 at the moment. He might push that up eventually, but he might not.

Hunter is 38. Don't bank on a repeat of last season. Avila is a very good catcher and has hit the ball better lately. But hitting is not what makes him valuable to this team.

Davis? Castellanos?

The speedy outfielder is returning to his career level, and the rookie — though talented — might need a while to figure out big-league pitching. It's not inconceivable that could take a season.

Ausmus said he wasn't worried about the offense because even in the losing streak his lineups have produced hits. He was candid that the pitching is the problem.

For now, that is indisputable. No team can win games giving up double-digit runs. But this pitching anomaly is hiding a potentially troubling trend.

This lineup is not deep. Yes, there is speed. Yes, it produces better defense while in the field. And yes, that combo — assuming the pitching returns to normal — might be more than plenty to secure another Central Division title.

After all, despite losing seven of eight, the Tigers still have a five-game lead in the division. That might say more about the quality of the teams in the Central than anything else.

It also might tell us that we can expect to see more dominant stretches from the Tigers this season. The pitching is certainly there.

The lineup?

That is trickier to figure.

For now, there isn't much Ausmus can do. He talked to his team privately Sunday — he wouldn't share the thrust of his message. He said there was no message to his team Monday.

His aim is mostly to stay the same, to keep his routine and show his players a sturdy hand.

"Baseball is not football," he said, "You can't force it down player's throats. Something's gotta click.

Something's gotta happen. And all of a sudden everything is back to normal."

That normal propelled the Tigers to the best record in baseball a little more than a week ago.

So what is normal now?

Oakland 10, Detroit 0: Why the Tigers lost Monday

May 27, 2014

By Sean Windsor/ Detroit Free Press

At Oakland Co. Coliseum, Oakland, Calif.

■ **WHAT HAPPENED:** Drew Smyly threw the ball up and over the middle of the plate. Oakland took advantage. Meanwhile, Tommy Milone — also a lefty — kept his pitches down in the zone. He changed speeds well. Not surprisingly, the Tigers struggled to square the ball. They collected five hits. The A's, on the other hand, had 11. Five of them were home runs. It was the third game in a row in which the Tigers gave up at least 10 runs.

■ **THINGS THAT GET IN THE WAY:** Like outfield walls. In the second inning, Brandon Moss — the A's designated hitter — smoked a ball toward right-center. Austin Jackson tracked it to the wall, timed his jump and leaped. He reached over and caught it for a split second. His momentum, however, forced his arm to carom into the top of the wall just as he caught it, jarring the ball loose. Moss had a home run.

... And like catchers' mitts. In the eighth inning, Bryan Holaday was called for catcher interference, and Craig Gentry took first. That call, along with an error and a walk, loaded the bases. Derek Norris then hit a grand slam.

■ **SOMEONE HAD TO WIN:** The Tigers entered Monday's game having lost six of seven. The A's had lost four in row. The teams with the two best records in the American League came into this series struggling. The A's got well early. The Tigers, not so much. Today, Max Scherzer takes the mound to try to turn this around. He will pitch against Sonny Gray, who leads the league in ERA at 1.99. Gray, you might recall, shut down the Tigers in last season's playoffs.

■ **OH, THAT BULLPEN!** Phil Coke gave up the grand slam to Norris. It was a line drive to the second deck, a missile. He did not, however, struggle as you might think. He issued one walk. The others got there because of an error and catcher interference.

Corey Knebel, meanwhile, pitched two scoreless innings. He gave up two hits and hit 96 m.p.h. He said he was more relaxed in his second outing — he was called up last week.

Detroit Tigers' Ian Kinsler gets rare off day in Oakland

May 27, 2014

By Shawn Windsor/ Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND — Ian Kinsler hadn't missed a start this season until Monday, even though his manager kept telling him he'd give him a day off.

He finally got one.

"We've ridden him a little hard," said Ausmus. "He doesn't get many innings off, let alone days off. He's the kind of guy you don't want to take out of the lineup."

That's especially hard at the moment, with the Tigers' offense struggling, and with Kinsler providing one of just three steady bats at the moment. Ausmus pointed out that Kinsler's absence left a void at the top.

He hoped Austin Jackson might fill it — the centerfielder got the nod at the No. 2 spot in the order. He went 0-for-4 with two strikeouts Monday.

As for Kinsler, said Ausmus, "I've told him about four times over the past month that it would be in the next week. I finally got around to it."

Kinsler had an 11-game hitting streak entering Monday and was hitting .400 during his last 11 games, including eight doubles.

■ NOTEBOOK:

Miguel Cabrera texted Ausmus Monday morning and told him he was good to go after dealing with a hamstring cramp Sunday. Cabrera played Monday and doubled in his second at-bat.

"He said he was fine," Ausmus said.

Pitcher Joba Chamberlain tweaked his ankle during the same game and told Ausmus he felt good Monday morning. Trainers wanted to watch Chamberlain throw and put weight on the ankle before letting him pitch. He was not used Monday.

"It doesn't seem to be anything serious," Ausmus said.

Oakland 10, Detroit 0: Five home runs pace A's against slumping Tigers

May 27, 2014

By Shawn Windsor/ Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND — For a moment, when Drew Smyly stepped off the mound in the bottom of the first inning to gather himself after an error put runners on the corners with no outs, he faced the sort of moment that can propel a team forward.

If he survived it.

He did, briefly, keeping the A's from scoring. Smyly set down the meat of Oakland's order under duress not 10 minutes into today's game.

Alas, it led to nothing, not for him — he gave up four solo homers and six total runs — not to his teammates, who managed zero runs on five hits and did nothing to stop the questions about where this offense went.

The Tigers lost 10-0.

They've lost seven of last eight. They've given up 10 or more runs in the last three games, 45 runs in the last five, 56 runs in the last six.

That's almost inconceivable considering a week ago they were the toast of baseball, the best combination of pitching and hitting. Now they are doing neither.

Manager Brad Ausmus insists both will return.

"I'm still fully confident that the pitching staff is extremely good," he said.

As for runs?

"We will score," he said.

But Ausmus doesn't think this is the primary issue.

"We are just not pitching well," he said.

Smyly looked like he might in the beginning. The early jam he faced was not his fault. Shortstop Andrew Romine misplayed a grounder with a runner on first and the error put runners at the corners with no outs.

Smyly then struck out Josh Donaldson and got Yoenis Cespedes to pop out to second. After 10 pitches to Jed Lowrie, he finally got the A's shortstop to fly out to right.

"He got out of that jam and I was hoping there would be a little carryover," said Ausmus.

There wasn't. Smyly gave up a home run to the next batter he faced — Brandon Moss. That seemed to deflate Smyly. From there, he gave up three more solo home runs. He allowed six runs off eight hits.

He did manage to last five innings, helping a bullpen that's been asked to work many innings during this stretch.

Smyly struggled to keep his pitches down in the strike zone. The opposite problem he had his last outing, when he gave up three runs on seven hits in five innings.

He walked five that game against Cleveland. That day he couldn't keep the ball out of the dirt, and the lack of control gave the Indians too many free passes.

It wasn't much prettier against Oakland. The Tigers booted the ball a few times and Phil Coke continued to struggle, giving up a grand slam in the bottom of the eighth — though in fairness to him, an error and catcher interference hurt.

Meanwhile, the Tigers managed only five hits.

"Of all the games," said Ausmu, "this was probably the most disappointing."

Ten-run shutouts have a way of doing that.

The Tigers fell to 28-19.

One day after team meeting, Tigers get smacked around again

May 27, 2014

By Tom Gage/ The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif. — It takes more than salt, pepper and steak sauce to make a bad Tigers game digestible these days.

Gristle is gristle, after all.

But that's what the Tigers, now 1-7 in their last eight games, have been serving up as pitching on a regular basis lately — especially while being outscored 34-6 in their last three games.

"We're in a really long rut right now," said manager Brad Ausmus. "But baseball isn't like football. You can't force it down players' throats. Something has to click, something has to happen, we have to get a good outing from a starter, and all of a sudden everything is back to normal.

"But there's no puzzle here. We just aren't pitching well."

Ausmus didn't hold a team meeting Monday about the slump but said he had spoke to the team about it Sunday.

"There was a message yesterday," Ausmus said Monday. "There was really nothing left to be said today."

On Monday, it was Drew Smyly's turn not to reverse the trend in a 10-0 loss to the Oakland Athletics — a game in which Smyly allowed as many home runs (four) in 2.1 innings as he did in 76 innings last year.

Another four runs came on the grand slam by Derek Norris off Phil Coke in the eighth.

It definitely was a home-run day. At least for Oakland.

As for the Tigers, "We didn't do anything great," Ausmus said. "Of all the games (in this skid), this was probably the most disappointing."

There was no sign of the firepower to come for the Athletics when they failed to take advantage of a first-and-third chance with no outs in the first inning.

If anything, it looked like advantage Smyly at the time — because the A's had failed to capitalize on an early chance after losing four in a row.

There was a highlight play in the top of the second: A's shortstop Jed Lowrie throwing Victor Martinez out at first after a grab deep in the hole at short. But it wasn't as if the difference between out-and-safe was the difference in a something-or-nothing inning for the Tigers.

It was at this point that the game began to unravel for Smyly. He gave up solo home runs to Brandon Moss and Kyle Blanks in the second — followed in the third by back-to-back home runs by Josh Donaldson and Yoenis Cespedes.

"I hung a cutter to Moss," Smyly said. "He did with it what he should have done. As for Cespedes, he went down and got a pitch as if he knew it was coming."

In the span of eight hitters, Smyly allowed four home runs — ranging from rockets to towering fly balls.

"It was like, 'Is this really happening?'" the Tigers starter said.

When the Athletics loaded the bases on two singles and a walk with no outs in the fourth, they stretched their lead to 6-0 on a sacrifice fly by Coco Crisp and a single by Donaldson.

"I didn't go a very good job of keeping the game close," said Smyly, who is 2-3. "They hit my good pitches and they hit my bad pitches."

Offensively, the Tigers countered with next to nothing against Oakland lefty Tommy Milone (3-3), who lasted into the seventh.

Possible explanations for the offensive emptiness could have been A) jet lag; B) a plate umpire in Jordan Baker that kept the Tigers guessing; and C) sparkplug Ian Kinsler getting a day off.

That's not to say those were offered explanations, however — because none comes close to being a legitimate reason the Tigers still don't look like themselves.

That's almost entirely a matter of starting pitching.

Rookie Corey Knebel worked two scoreless innings of relief, snapping off several impressive curves.

"He looked a lot more settled," Ausmus said.

But what would have been a reason to remember this game beyond the micro-moment of its last out was the catch Austin Jackson would have made — had he made it.

Proving again that it doesn't have to be a catch to be a highlight.

This goes back, of course, to trying to make games digestible. By now, you've run out of Danny Worth knuckleballs to read about.

And there was only one Andrew Romine home run last week to feature.

So if Jackson — with a high leap at the wall in the second on Moss' home run, a ball that was in his glove before it flipped out — had actually been able to make the catch, it would have been a reason to earmark this game as memorable.

"It would have been awesome," Smyly said.

But Jackson didn't make the catch.

And home runs — plus another lopsided Tigers' loss — ended up as the story of the day.

Tigers' Ian Kinsler gets the day off against A's to 'throttle back'

May 27, 2014

By Tom Gage/ The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif. — Even before Tigers manager Brad Ausmus wrote down a lineup on Monday, his question had been answered.

Miguel Cabrera would be able to play. The hamstring cramp that knocked him out of Sunday's 12-4 loss to the Texas Rangers at Comerica Park already had gone away.

"He texted me this morning before he got here, saying he was fine," Ausmus said.

Cabrera went 1-for-4 with a double in Monday's 10-0 loss to the A's.

One absentee from the Tigers' starting lineup was second baseman Ian Kinsler, who has an 11-game hitting streak, and had played in every game, but to whom Ausmus has been trying to give a day off.

"He's not had many innings off, let alone a day off," Ausmus said. "I've been promising him one, and finally got around to giving him one.

"It's more a mental day off than anything — having a day you can throttle back and watch the game instead of grinding over every single pitch and every single at-bat.

"I told him about four times over the past month it would be in the next week."

With Kinsler out, Austin Jackson hit second for just the second time in his career.

"He's been making better contact and getting some walks," Ausmus said of Jackson, who went hitless in four at-bats.

Joba Chamberlain, who also came out of Sunday's game with an ankle bruise, said he was good to go for Monday's game. He didn't pitch in Monday's loss.

Week 8 MLB Power Rankings: Giants back at No. 1; struggling Tigers take a tumble

May 27, 2014

By Tony Paul/ The Detroit News

Tony Paul goes around the league, with the eighth of his weekly Major League Baseball Power Rankings.

1. Giants (2 last week): About the only thing they're losing these days is Hunter Pence's legendary scooter.
2. A's (3): Nearly one-10th of their 52 home runs on the season came in Monday's win over the Tigers.
3. Tigers (1): The last time they coughed up 10 or more runs in three consecutive games was in July 2007.
4. Cardinals (6): Interesting. The St. Louis media is gushing over Jhonny Peralta, the great defensive shortstop.
5. Braves (7): Closer Craig Kimbrel nearly is on pace to strike out more than two batters an inning (36 in 18.1).
6. Angels (9): Mike Trout is looking a bit more human this year, with just five steals and 57 strikeouts in 48 games.
7. Yankees (8): Leave it to Robin Ventura to question all the Derek Jeter farewell gifts. "He's not dying."
8. Rockies (4): Troy Tulowitzki's amazing season just keeps rolling on. His OBP is .480, his OPS 1.200.
9. Brewers (5): They're starting to see they do, indeed, have some issues, particularly in the pitching department.
10. Blue Jays (20): Quite the 1-2 punch in Edwin Encarnacion and Jose Bautista, who've totaled 27 homers and 76 RBIs.
11. Dodgers (10): Only bad thing about those back-to-back no-hit bids? Vin Scully didn't get to call either one.
12. Orioles (11): What a steal Nelson Cruz was for one year and \$8 million. He's up to 16 homers and 45 RBIs.
13. Rangers (16): Give them some credit. With a small army on the DL, they took three of four from the Tigers.
14. Nationals (12): After a shoddy Nats debut, ex-Tiger Doug Fister is 2-0 with a sub-1.00 WHIP in three starts since.
15. Twins (15): Young outfielder Aaron Hicks already is ditching switch-hitting. He'll bat only right-handed now.
16. Mariners (14): Big series this weekend for the M's. Lloyd McClendon gets to face his old employer, the Tigers.
17. Pirates (23): Don Kelly's brother-in-law, Neil Walker, is making a case for an All-Star nod.
18. Marlins (19): Giancarlo Stanton hit his 15th homer Monday. I'd bet half were simply majestic.
19. White Sox (18): If they can pick up a couple pitchers at the deadline, I really believe they'll contend.
20. Royals (17): As a team, they've combined for 20 homers in 1,673 at-bats. Man, that's brutal.
21. Red Sox (13): Boston was upset about Tampa Bay stealing up five runs? The Sox won Monday — after being down by five.
22. Indians (21): They won four games out of 19 against the Tigers last year. This year, they've won four of five.
23. Rays (25): After five good starts in a row, veteran lefty Erik Bedard finally threw a clunker Monday.
24. Reds (24): How bad is their lineup? Monday's batting order including Brayan Pena and Ramon Santiago.
25. Phillies (22): Josh Beckett was the first pitcher to no-hit the Phillies since St. Louis' Bob Forsch in 1978.
26. Padres (28): They should've traded Chase Headley when they had the chance. His slash line: .207/.295/.353.
27. Mets (26): Sure, the hitting coach is to blame. Not that sad-sack lineup full of Lucas Duda and Co.
28. Cubs (30): Yay. Jeff Samardzija finally got a win to go with his 1.68 ERA. He'll likely be traded very soon.
29. Diamondbacks (27): It'll be interesting to watch the Tony La Russa-Kirk Gibson dynamic. Not sure on their relationship.
30. Astros (29): Ooooh! Some fighting words from Lloyd McClendon, who called Dadrilas Kuechel an "average pitcher."

Austin Jackson's near-miss on homer ball might have turned tide against Tigers

May 27, 2014

By Tom Gage/ The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif. — Before they realized they were going to lose another lopsided game ...

And before their body language began to get confusing because of how many pitches they were questioning, the Tigers came to a pivotal moment in Monday's 10-0 loss to the Athletics — while the game was still scoreless. It happened in the second inning. Drew Smyly had done a fine job of getting out of a first-and-third jam with no outs in the first, the Tigers hadn't yet lapsed into the offensive doldrums they would reach against winning pitcher Tommy Milone, and when Brandon Moss launched a hanging pitch to deep center, the game's early advantage was at stake.

Austin Jackson had time to get to the wall and make a leap for the ball. More than that, he had time to get to the wall, leap for the ball, and actually give himself a chance to catch it ...

Before his return to Earth got in the way, that is.

Somehow, as Jackson came down, the ball flipped out of his glove and instead of a great catch, it turned out to be Moss' 12th home run.

Important?

Not in the context of a game that ended 10-0.

But it was important at the time for a starter who needed all the breaks, and all the good plays behind him, he could get.

“It would have been a highlight-reel catch,” Tigers manager Brad Ausmus said, “but unfortunately for us, it snapped out of his glove. A part of me thinks it changes the course of the game. But we'll never know.”

No one was more disappointed at not catching the ball, however, than the man who didn't catch it.

“At first, I thought I had it,” Jackson said. “I felt it in my glove.”

Then he didn't.

And that's the crushing moment when Jackson knew, “I obviously didn't have it. Looking at the replay, it was one of those tip-of-the-glove plays. It just didn't come back with me.”

Around the horn

Victor Martinez was the only Tiger with more than one hit. He had two singles to hike his batting average to .341.

... After Andrew Romine doubled his first time up, he was 6-for-11 since hitting his first home run.

... Derek Norris' grand slam off Phil Coke in the eighth occurred after the A's loaded the bases on a walk, catcher's interference by Bryan Holaday and an error at third by Nick Castellanos. Norris connected on a 2-1 pitch. Two of the four runs off Coke were unearned.

Believe it or not, Alex Avila is one of baseball's top catchers

May 27, 2014

By Kurt Mensching/ The Detroit News

What if someone told you Alex Avila is one of the top catchers in baseball? You'd think they were crazy, right? Avila went 0-for-2 Sunday against the Rangers, causing his average to fall to .229. That doesn't have a good look to it, does it?

For that reason, the suggestion has risen more than once that the Tigers need to not only find another shortstop, but another starting catcher as well.

That's just not true.

If all you see is Avila's average, you're missing everything else he does to help the team. For instance, he actually did reach base twice by walk in that game. His on-base percentage improved to .359, which trails Victor Martinez (.389), Miguel Cabrera (.369) and Ian Kinsler (.360), but leads everyone else with the Tigers. That's why you can't let batting average or strikeouts sway your view of a player too much. Avila may be striking out too much, but he's still finding a way to work pitchers, get on base and extend innings. That's pretty important.

Avila's also hitting the ball with some power, giving him his highest slugging average and isolated power since 2011, his Silver Slugger season.

We could look at other advanced stats, with names like weighted on-base average or runs created, and they'd tell a similar story. Among catchers with at least 100 plate appearances this year, Avila ranks in the upper third. Contrary to belief, Avila's helping his team at the plate.

He's helping in the field, too, which is truly where a catcher's focus most needs to be.

On Sunday Avila threw out would-be base stealer No. 18 of the season. That's more than he had in all of 2013 (15).

That stat can be misleading, too. For one, throwing a runner out shouldn't always be credited or blamed on the catcher. The pitcher plays a role in keeping runners near the bag and by having a quick delivery to the plate.

Catchers also receive caught stealing (CS) credit for pickoffs without even touching the ball.

But the eye test agrees with the statistics in this case. Runners are challenging the Detroit battery and Avila is making them pay for the decision.

Then you've got pitch framing. A study by Baseball Prospectus last year showed Avila to be among the best catchers at helping sway umpires to calls strikes, which saves runs.

You've got to consider Avila's work behind the scenes and chemistry with his staff, too. During the past three seasons, the Tigers' pitching staff has found more success with Avila behind the plate than any other catcher. His catcher's ERA has been a third- to a half-run better than his teammates during that time.

Add Avila's offense and defense up and you'll find he's one of the top catchers in the game right now. He ranks sixth overall and third in the American League in WAR, per Baseball-Reference's version of the statistic.

It's not easy to replace a player like that, so stop trying, because you're not going to be able to do it. You might find a catcher who's a little better at the plate, but you're probably not going to find a more balanced player.

And why give up prospects to fix a problem that doesn't exist when the Tigers have other, more obvious problems to fix first?

No doubt Avila would be a better catcher if he struck out less often and managed to find a few more hits along the way. But what he's doing is already more than enough. The Tigers are just fine at the catcher position.

Detroit Tigers' Austin Jackson just misses making catch on home run by Brandon Moss (video)

May 27, 2014

By Chris Iott/MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- The Oakland Athletics hit five home runs Monday on their way to a 10-0 shutout of the Detroit Tigers. Austin Jackson nearly pulled one of them back.

The game was scoreless in the bottom of the second inning when A's designated hitter Brandon Moss hit an 0-1 cutter from starter Drew Smyly deep to center field. Jackson raced to his left and timed his leap perfectly. The ball initially landed in his glove but popped out and landed beyond the fence for a home run.

"It was a great effort by Jax," Tigers manager Brad Ausmus said. "He almost came up with. He's a great athlete. Unfortunately for us, it snapped out of his glove as he was trying to bring it back."

The A's went on to hit four solo home runs and score six runs off Smyly on their way to an easy victory.

Ausmus felt that the home run by Moss might have been a key turning point.

"If he catches it, it's a highlight-reel catch," Ausmus said. "Part of me thinks it changes the course of the game, really, but we'll never know."

Struggling Detroit Tigers routed by Oakland A's one day after manager Brad Ausmus addressed team

May 27, 2014

By Chris Iott/MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- The details remain between the manager and the players. But Detroit Tigers manager Brad Ausmus addressed the team Sunday after the Tigers completed their four-game series against the Texas Rangers with a 12-4 loss.

Ausmus referred to it Monday afternoon following his team's 10-0 loss to the Oakland Athletics, but he did not go into detail.

The topic came up immediately after the game when Ausmus was asked whether he had any message for his team following the 10-0 loss, the seventh loss in eight games for the struggling Tigers.

"There was no message," Ausmus said. "We had a message yesterday, so there's really nothing to be said today. We didn't really do much, we really didn't do anything very well, so we kind of deserved it."

What was the nature of the message?

"That's between me and them," Ausmus said.

A little more than a week ago, the Tigers were flying high with a six-game winning streak, a 27-12 record and a seven-game lead in the American League Central Division. But the Tigers have dropped seven of eight games since then, beginning with a sweep in Cleveland.

The Tigers still hold a five-game lead in the AL Central, where every other team is currently below .500.

Detroit's starting pitching, a strong point through the first six weeks of the season, has taken a nosedive. The Tigers have allowed 34 runs in their past three games, 56 in their past six and have allowed nine or more runs in five of their past six games.

In the past six games, Tigers opponents have scored 12 runs two times along with games of 11, 10 and nine runs. The Tigers held the Rangers to two runs Friday in a 7-2 win, the only victory for Detroit since the team completed a sweep of the Red Sox in Boston on May 18.

The Tigers lost consecutive games to the Rangers by scores of 12-2 and 12-4, which led to the events following the game Sunday, which apparently is more accurately termed as an address by Ausmus than a full-fledged team meeting.

"It's been rough for us as team," outfielder Torii Hunter said of the recent stretch of games. "The last seven days, of course it's baseball, but it's kind of weird, the way we've been playing well and everything and playing as a team. ... The last seven days we've been getting crushed."

Of course, the Tigers didn't do much right at all Monday. The A's hit four home runs and scored six runs off Tigers starter Drew Smyly. Phil Coke allowed a grand slam home run after a walk, a catcher's interference call and an error on Nick Castellanos loaded the bases for the A's with no outs in the eighth.

The Tigers had just five hits and never got a runner past second base. The way the offense performed for the Tigers, one A's run would have been enough. The next nine runs were effectively just the A's spiking the ball.

"I'm not really puzzled," Ausmus said. "There's no puzzle here. We're not pitching well. It's pretty clear cut, really. We're just not pitching well."

Ausmus said the team still feels good about itself.

"Despite the fact that we've kind of been getting our tails whipped lately, in the clubhouse this morning everyone was in a good mood, everyone felt good about the game," he said. "It just didn't go our way. We did not play great today. We didn't hit great. We didn't field great. We didn't pitch great. So, of all the games this week, this has probably been the most disappointing."

The fact that the Tigers put together such a lackluster performance the day after Ausmus addressed them could be seen as a red flag. But Hunter, who declined to discuss the nature of Ausmus's message, shrugged off that idea.

"Usually it calms you down," he said. "It calms you down. You take a deep breath. But today, those boys came out swinging. They had five homers. They're pretty good."

Athletics 10, Tigers 0: Oakland rocks Drew Smyly for four home runs as Detroit skid continues

May 27, 2014

By Chris Iott/MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Despite their division-leading records, the Detroit Tigers and the Oakland Athletics were both slumping as they entered their four-game series. The A's bounced back Monday. The Tigers did not. The A's hit four home runs in the first three innings off Tigers left-hander Drew Smyly and five home runs in all Monday afternoon on their way to an easy 10-0 victory over the Tigers.

The game marked just the second time this season the Tigers have been shut out.

The A's ended a four-game losing streak with the victory. The Tigers have lost seven of eight, starting with a three-game sweep by the Cleveland Indians on the road last week.

The Tigers had just four hits in 6 2/3 innings against A's starter Tommy Milone (3-3). Despite doubles by Andrew Romine and Miguel Cabrera, the Tigers never had a runner reach third base in the game.

The Tigers have allowed 56 runs in their past six games and have allowed nine or more runs in five of those six games.

Tigers' highlights

-- Corey Knebel entered the game in the sixth inning in relief of Smyly and retired the side in order. He struck out two of the three batters he faced in the inning. Knebel allowed two singles in the seventh but got out of the jam and finished with two scoreless innings.

-- Nick Castellanos walked two times for the second consecutive day. Castellanos had just five walks for the season prior to the game Sunday against the Texas Rangers but now has nine.

Tigers' lowlights

-- Andrew Romine committed an error for the second consecutive day when he booted a hard grounder off the bat of Derek Norris in the first inning. That gave the A's runners at first and third with nobody out, but Smyly (2-3) managed to escape the inning without allowing any runs.

-- Austin Jackson almost made an excellent catch in the second inning when he nearly stole a home run from A's designated hitter Brandon Moss. Jackson timed his leap perfectly and the ball momentarily was the inside of his glove, but it appeared to jar loose when his arm hit the wall. The home run by Moss gave the A's a 1-0 lead. Two batters later, Kyle Blanks hit a solo home run to make it 2-0.

-- Josh Donaldson and Yoenis Cespedes hit back-to-back home runs off Smyly with one out in the third inning. That gave the A's four home runs on the day and a 4-0 lead.

-- The A's made it 6-0 in the fourth. After loading the bases with nobody out against Smyly, the A's scored on a sacrifice fly by Coco Crisp and an RBI single by Donaldson.

-- The A's tacked on four more runs on a grand slam by Norris off Tigers relief pitcher Phil Coke. Coke walked the leadoff hitter in the eighth before the A's loaded the bases on a catcher's interference call against Bryan Holaday and an error on Castellanos on what could easily have been a double play. Norris then smacked a Coke offering over the wall in left for his first career grand slam and a 10-0 lead.

Game notes

-- The line for Smyly: 5IP, 8H, 6R, 6ER, 2BB, 3SO. He threw 107 pitches, 71 for strikes. The eight hits and six earned runs allowed tied career highs for Smyly.

-- The line for Milone: 6.2IP, 4H, 0R, 0ER, 2BB, 6SO. He threw 105 pitches, 65 for strikes.

-- Ian Kinsler was not in the starting lineup for the Tigers for the first time this season. Kinsler had started each of the first 46 games for the Tigers, all at second base.

Seventh-inning stretch: Athletics 6, Tigers 0

May 27, 2014

By Chris Iott/MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Drew Smyly allowed a home run. Then another one. Then another one. And another. The Oakland Athletics jumped on Smyly for four solo home runs in the first three innings Monday afternoon and held a 6-0 lead through six innings. Smyly allowed six runs on eight hits in five innings of work before giving way to Corey Knebel to start the sixth.

Detroit Tigers notebook: Austin Jackson makes rare start in second spot; Miguel Cabrera feels good

May 27, 2014

By Chris Iott/MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Detroit Tigers manager Brad Ausmus left Ian Kinsler out of the starting lineup for the first time this season. He inserted Rajai Davis into the leadoff spot, then chose Austin Jackson over Torii Hunter to hit second.

It will be just the second time in Jackson's career that he has started a game in the second spot in the lineup.

"He said if he goes 4 for 4 he wants to be back there," Ausmus said. "We'll see. I hope he does go 4 for 4."

The only other time Jackson hit second also took place in Oakland. He went 1 for 4 with two strikeouts on April 17, 2011 in a game at the O.co Coliseum. The Tigers suffered a 5-1 loss in that game. Will Rhymes hit in the leadoff spot in that game.

Miguel Cabrera left the game early Sunday with a hamstring cramp, but he was good to go a day later.

"He texted me this morning even before he got here and told me he was fine," Ausmus said.

Cabrera was in the starting lineup in his customary third spot and started at first base.

Chamberlain good to go

Joba Chamberlain mug.jpg

Joba Chamberlain

Joba Chamberlain said he the ankle contusion he suffered Sunday afternoon isn't holding him back and the he expects to be available out of the bullpen Monday afternoon against the Oakland Athletics.

"He said he feels good, but he still has to throw," Ausmus said a bit more than two hours prior to the start of the game. "He has to toss and he also has to get off a rubber and see, make sure he can push off of it."

Detroit Tigers Gameday: Miguel Cabrera at first base, Ian Kinsler not in lineup for 1st time in 2014

May 27, 2014

By Chris Iott/MLive.com

GAME INFORMATION

Who: Detroit Tigers (28-18, 1st in AL Central) at Oakland Athletics (30-20, 1st in AL West)

When: 4:05 p.m.

Where: O.co Coliseum in Oakland

TV: Live on Fox Sports Detroit

Radio: 97.1 The Ticket and the Detroit Tigers radio network

Twitter: Follow Chris Iott

STARTING PITCHERS

Detroit Tigers

Drew Smyly (2-2, 2.97 ERA)

Lifetime vs. Athletics: 0-0, 19.29 ERA

Oakland Athletics

Tommy Milone (2-3, 3.99 ERA)

Lifetime vs. Tigers: 2-0, 3.24 ERA

STARTING LINEUPS

(Statistics vs. opposing starter in parentheses)

Detroit Tigers

1. Rajai Davis, LF (3 for 8, 2B)
2. Austin Jackson, CF (1 for 10, 2B)
3. Miguel Cabrera, 1B (4 for 10, 2 2Bs)
4. Victor Martinez, DH (1 for 2)
5. Torii Hunter, RF (4 for 7, HR)
6. Nick Castellanos, 3B
7. Bryan Holaday, C
8. Danny Worth, 2B (1 for 3)
9. Andrew Romine, SS (0 for 2)

Oakland Athletics

1. Coco Crisp, CF (1 for 2)
2. Derek Norris, C
3. Josh Donaldson, 3B (1 for 1, 2B)
4. Yoenis Cespedes, LF (0 for 0, BB)
5. Jed Lowrie, SS (1 for 3, 2B)
6. Brandon Moss, DH (1 for 2, HR, 3 RBIs)
7. Alberto Callaspo, 2B (2 for 5, 2B)
8. Kyle Blanks, 1B
9. Craig Gentry, RF (0 for 3)

GAME NOTES

-- The four-game series between the Tigers and the Athletics pits the top two teams in the American League against each other. But both are reeling a bit. The Tigers have dropped six of their past seven games, while the A's dropped the final four games on their road trip that ended Sunday.

-- Smyly will face the A's for the first time as a starter and has been beaten up pretty bad by Oakland in three relief appearances. He has allowed five runs on five hits in 2 1/3 innings against the A's.

-- Miguel Cabrera had been listed as day to day after battling a hamstring cramp Sunday afternoon, but he is in the lineup and starting at first base for the Tigers.

-- Ian Kinsler is not in the starting lineup for the Tigers for the first time this season. He started at second base in all previous 46 games. Danny Worth will start at second base and bat eighth. With Kinsler out, Rajai Davis and Austin Jackson will bat in the top two spots in the order. The game today will mark the first time Jackson has hit somewhere besides the fifth or sixth spot this season.

-- The forecast for Oakland calls for temperatures in the low 70s and mostly sunny skies this afternoon. It should be a great day for a ballgame.

Offense quieted as Tigers drop opener in Oakland

May 27, 2014

By Rick Eymer/ MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Drew Smyly could only shake his head each time one of his pitches was redirected out of the ballpark.

"Honestly, I felt like the ball was coming out of my hand pretty well," Smyly said following the Detroit Tigers' 10-0 series-opening loss to the Oakland Athletics on Monday. "I was attacking hitters and putting myself into good counts. I don't know how you give up four solo home runs in one game, but there it is. They hit my good pitches and they hit my bad pitches."

Meanwhile, the Tigers were having all kinds of trouble with A's starter Tommy Milone, who lasted 6 2/3 innings, allowing four hits, walking two and striking out six.

Miguel Cabrera and Andrew Romine both doubled, and they were the only two Tigers in scoring position all day. Victor Martinez had two hits for Detroit.

Martinez has hit safely in 25 of his last 28 games, batting .366 with nine doubles, nine home runs and 22 RBIs. "The offense is not the problem," Tigers' manager Brad Ausmus said. "Starting pitching is the issue. It's pretty clear cut. We're in a really long rut right now. It's still just seven games out of 162. I'm still fully confident this pitching staff is extremely good."

Anibal Sanchez, who pitches Wednesday night, has the Tigers' last two wins. Ausmus hopes he doesn't have to wait that long to kick-start his team on another winning streak.

"We wanted to turn this thing around three days ago, but it didn't happen," Ausmus said. "Hopefully Max [Scherzer] can take the ball [Tuesday] and help us right the ship. We really didn't do anything very well today." The Tigers were hitless in five at-bats with runners in scoring position and are now batting .174 (15-for-86) in those situations over the past eight games. The Tigers have stranded 75 runners over that span and have been outscored, 67-31.

"Offensively, we were on it all day and just kept going after it," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "Getting add-on runs against a team like that is important, because you know they can come back at any particular time."

Smyly (2-3) lasted five innings, allowing six runs on eight hits. He walked two and struck out three for the Tigers, who lost for the seventh time in the last eight games since sweeping the Red Sox in Boston.

"I felt like I pitched OK," Smyly said. "I couldn't seem to keep it in the park. I'd get ahead in the count, and then leave a ball up, and home run."

The first four runs Smyly allowed were all solo home runs, two in the second and two in the third. He also gave up two runs in the fourth, though he did pitch out of a bases-loaded, no-out situation.

Smyly had given up four home runs in his previous nine starts.

The Tigers can usually depend on Smyly when he pitches on the road and during the day, but not against the A's.

He entered the game with a career 7-1 record and a 3.02 ERA in road contests, and had a 4-2 mark, with one save, and an ERA of 2.70 in daylight.

Smyly made three relief appearances against the A's before making his first start against them. He gave up five runs over 2 1/3 innings in those games.

The A's were 1-for-6 against Smyly with runners in scoring position. He's limited opponents to a .194 average in those situations this season.

"It wasn't a great outing for him," Ausmus said. "At least he got deep enough in the game where the bullpen wasn't completely torn apart."

Corey Knebel, who had allowed three runs in one inning in his first outing with the Tigers, pitched two scoreless innings. Phil Coke, who did not allow a run in his past two outings, coughed up Derek Norris' grand slam and was charged with two earned runs in an inning.

"I'm sure there are some tired arms down there," Ausmus said. "But they are part of a team and they have to pick up the starters right now."

California native Coke draws crowd of family, friends

May 27, 2014

By Rick Eymer/ MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Left-hander Phil Coke had his own personal fan club in attendance as the Detroit Tigers opened a three-game series with the Oakland Athletics on Monday.

Coke grew up in Sonora, a quaint city off the beaten path about four hours east of Oakland that has connections to the California Gold Rush and, despite recent growth, retains a small-town atmosphere.

"There will be all kinds of people from up the hill," said Coke, who began to rattle off numerous folks expected to attend, including members of his family, his extended family, in-laws and his best friend's family.

"Two years ago when I was here, I was shagging in the outfield and I heard someone calling my name," Coke said. "I look over and it's a friend of mine sitting out in left field. These guys come down to watch a baseball game, and I'm just part of the sideshow. They don't care where they sit."

Coke has appeared in five of the Tigers' last eight games, pitching a total of 7 2/3 innings, and he appears to be smoothing things out. He's allowed three runs over his past 8 2/3 innings, a 3.11 ERA that has dropped his season ERA to its current season-low 6.06.

He made three appearances during a 20-day stretch between April 26 and May 17.

"I'm the kind of guy that the more I threw the better I did," Coke said. "It was awkward to throw one day, then take five days off. We needed innings out of me and I'm more than happy to do it. I feel I can do anything I'm asked to do."

Cabrera in Tigers' lineup after hamstring cramp

OAKLAND -- The Tigers held their collective breath when slugger Miguel Cabrera left Sunday's game with a cramp in his right hamstring.

They can breath easier knowing Cabrera was in the starting lineup against the Oakland Athletics on Monday.

"He texted me this morning and said he was fine," Tigers manager Brad Ausmus said. The two-time reigning American League MVP winner, who leads the AL with a .415 batting average with runners in scoring position, has driven in 35 runs over his past 30 games.

Right-hander Joba Chamberlain also left Sunday's game with a sore ankle, but he told Ausmus he was good to go Monday.

"He still has to throw off a rubber," Ausmus said. "We have to see if he can push off of it. Right now it doesn't seem to be anything."

Kinsler gets a day off from Tigers' lineup

OAKLAND -- Tigers manager Brad Ausmus had been planning to give infielder Ian Kinsler, who played in the team's first 46 games, a day off. He finally got around to it on Monday.

"I've told him about four times in the past month he'd be getting a day off next week," Ausmus said. "It's hard to find innings off for him, let alone games. I don't want to take him out of the lineup, but we've ridden him a little hard."

Kinsler, who has an 11-game hitting streak and ranks second in the American League with a .330 batting average, shrugged it off.

"It's always nice to get a day," he said.

Rajai Davis assumed the leadoff role in the lineup and Austin Jackson stepped into the No. 2 spot.

"I have no plan to keep him there," Ausmus said of Jackson. "I do feel comfortable with him there for a day.

He's not striking out as much and he's getting walks."

Utility player Danny Worth took over at second base.

Kinsler is hitting .400 during his streak.

Marquee matchup awaits as A's, Tigers continue series

May 27, 2014

By Matt Slovin/ MLB.com

The most exciting pitching matchup of this week's four-game set between the Tigers and Athletics will come Tuesday night as Max Scherzer opposes Sonny Gray.

"It will be fun," Gray said. "It's a series that both teams want to win. You can look at it as being important to both teams."

Scherzer said his primary focus will be on the Oakland lineup, though he's aware he will be countered by the budding ace of the A's staff.

"It will be interesting to see how he attacks our lineup," Scherzer said. "I haven't seen him too much. I saw him pitch in the playoffs and I know he has a good curveball."

Scherzer's start comes on the heels of his worst outing of the season, in which he allowed 12 hits and seven runs in seven innings of work at Cleveland. That's longer than he's lasted in his last three starts against Oakland.

"Oakland is well rounded," said Scherzer, who has a 4.20 ERA against the A's for his career. "They have guys who get base, guys who can steal, and they hit for power. They have a little bit of everything; they challenge you."

Monday afternoon, the two teams met up for their first game since the 2013 ALDS, when the Tigers eliminated the A's in a decisive Game 5. Leading up to the matinee, which the A's won convincingly, 10-0, both teams had to fly across the country -- Detroit from home and Oakland from Toronto.

Tigers shortstop Andrew Romine said the travel schedule, which has them playing six series in as many cities, "has been weird."

"It seems like we're playing more day games than night games," Romine said. "We know we're a good team, we just have to get back to doing what we do best."

Tigers: Ausmus and Melvin no strangers

Monday might have marked the first time Tigers manager Brad Ausmus faced A's skipper Bob Melvin as counterparts in the dugout, but the two former Major League catchers are familiar with one another. In fact, Melvin was Ausmus' bench coach and catching coach during the 2000 season in Detroit.

"I'm pretty close to him," Melvin said. "He was the kind of the guy that always asked the questions that most players don't. He watched the game a little bit differently, as catchers do and are programmed to do. But if there was a guy back then that I would have said, 'You know, this guy's got a chance to be a manager,' it's him. He's come into a great situation and done a great job."

A's: Melvin compares Scherzer to Gray

Melvin served as the manager of the D-backs when Scherzer came up in that organization, debuting in 2008. He said he notices similarities in the makeup of Tuesday's starters, Scherzer and Gray, having managed them both.

"Both bulldogs," Melvin said of the aces. "Both guys that at young ages felt like that they could succeed. The stuff's a little different with what they do, but certainly the makeup is the same."

Melvin said Scherzer personifies a trend that has come to baseball in recent years: more emotion from players. "Sonny can be emotional out there at times, too, and it's just kind of who they are. You let them be themselves," he said.

Gray also notices the competitive nature of Scherzer and admires it.

"He pitches with a lot of emotion and I like that as a player," Gray said. "It looks like he really, really, really wants to win and he has a lot of fun doing it."

Worth noting

Tigers second baseman Ian Kinsler was out of the lineup Monday for the first time all season. He is expected to return Tuesday after taking a day off.

Tigers get clobbered again, 10-0 at Oakland

May 27, 2014

By Dana Wakiji/ FOXSportsDetroit.com

Max Scherzer, Tigers fans turn their lonely eyes to you now.

The Tigers used to rely on Justin Verlander to be the stopper when things were going badly, but now they're hoping the reigning AL Cy Young winner can be the guy to stop the bleeding.

After a 10-0 thumping at the hands of the A's Monday in Oakland, the Tigers have lost seven of their last eight. In the last eight games, Tigers starters have allowed 44 earned runs on 75 hits in 44 innings.

"The starting pitching right now is the issue," Tigers manager Brad Ausmus told FOX Sports Detroit's Trevor Thompson on the post-game show. "We didn't score runs today. We didn't hit today, but we've gotten hits over the past few games. I'm not concerned about that. We'll score runs.

"And we're going to pitch fine, too. Our starting pitching will be fine, but we're just in a really long rut right now, so hopefully (Tuesday) Max takes the mound and rights the ship."

Drew Smyly, starting for the first time in a week, fell to 2-3 with a 3.86 ERA after allowing six runs on eight hits in just five innings. He walked two and struck out three.

Oddly, four of the eight hits were solo home runs, a new career high against Smyly.

"I was just trying to go attack the hitters," Smyly told Thompson. "I feel like I was putting myself in good counts, then make one mistake, they just hit a home run.

"I don't know how you give up four solo home runs in one game, but it happens. So just wasn't my best day." Brandon Moss and Kyle Blanks got Smyly in the second inning. Center fielder Austin Jackson nearly robbed Moss but wasn't able to keep it in his glove.

"He made an outstanding play," Moss told Thompson on the field after the game. "I thought he caught it, then I saw it pop out.

"Definitely would have been one of the best plays I've ever seen. I was just thankful he didn't catch it."

Josh Donaldson and Yoenis Cespedes got Smyly in the third.

"Just do better next start," Smyly said. "Hopefully, it goes in my favor."

After rolling out 11 straight road wins, the Tigers have seen things go decidedly south since their belated arrival in Cleveland due to plane trouble.

They lost all three games in Cleveland, two in extra innings, which started a bad trip through the rotation.

In their last six games, the Tigers have allowed 56 runs, an average of 9.3 runs a game. That won't win many contests.

Scherzer is 6-1 with a 2.59 ERA, but he'll be matched up Tuesday against Sonny Gray, who's 5-1 with a league-leading 1.99 ERA.

"I think you'll see some outstanding pitching," Moss said. "There's no shying away from that. Runs are gonna be at a premium."

Despite allowing seven earned runs on 12 hits in seven innings against Cleveland last time, Scherzer is more than capable of halting the skid.

"We wanted to turn it around three days ago, but it just hasn't happened," Ausmus said. "Baseball is not football. You can't force it down players' throats.

"Something's gotta click. Something's gotta happen. We have to have a good outing from our starter, and all of a sudden, everything's back to normal. Hopefully, it's (Tuesday)."

Slumping Tigers meet slumping A's

May 27, 2014

By Kevin Chroust/ FOXSpotsDetroit

The top two teams in the American League haven't exactly piqued anticipation for their coming series with the kind of play one might expect of clubs fitting such a description.

Nevertheless, the Detroit Tigers visit the Oakland Athletics Monday to kick off a four-game set with the clubs looking to overcome different types of struggles. (Pregame at 3 p.m. EDT, first pitch 4:05 on FOX Sports Detroit.)

The A's (3-20) are on a season-worst four-game skid, and their bats have been dreadful with 13 runs and a .172 average in their last six after Sunday's 3-1 loss in Toronto. Jed Lowry's struggles continued -- he's 1 for 17 over his last six games after going 0 for 4.

"You're not always going to score seven, eight runs a game and right now we're going through a drought," manager Bob Melvin said.

They've had a great deal of success against the AL Central, going 30-9 since May 17, 2013, including 15-4 at home.

The Tigers (28-18) have dropped six of seven after Sunday's 12-4 loss in Texas, and their starting pitching has been abysmal with an 8.77 ERA and .385 opponent average in that stretch.

"It's a rough patch, but this is a great baseball team," losing starter Justin Verlander said. "That hasn't changed." Even so, the most alarming aspect of the loss might have been Miguel Cabrera leaving in the seventh inning with a right hamstring cramp. He's listed as day to day.

Oakland might be sending the right guy to the mound to help end its skid. Tommy Milone (2-3, 3.99 ERA) struggled through his first five starts but has turned it around in his last three, allowing three runs and 12 hits over his last 19 2-3 innings.

He's 2-0 with a 1.37 ERA and .171 opponent batting average in that span, earning his latest win after holding Tampa Bay to two runs and five hits in 5 2-3 innings of Wednesday's 3-2 victory.

The left-hander has had Derek Norris behind the plate in four straight starts, and he thinks they've figured out a winning routine.

"Really, the last three starts D-No's caught me, I don't think I've shook him off one time," Milone told the team's official website. "It's a really comfortable feeling knowing I can go out there and whatever he throws down, and I can execute it."

Milone is 2-0 with a 3.24 ERA in three starts versus the Tigers.

He'll be opposed by Drew Smyly, who squeezed in a scoreless relief inning between his last start and the trip to Oakland. Smyly (2-2, 2.97) should be glad he won't face the A's out of the bullpen.

The left-hander's three appearances against Oakland have all come in relief, and he's allowed five runs in 2 1-3 innings.

An abundance of traffic on the base paths was an issue in his last start as he allowed three runs and seven hits with five walks in five innings of a 5-4 loss in Cleveland last Monday without factoring into the decision.

Prior to this season, Smyly had issued 2.46 walks per nine innings as a starter. In six starts this year, he's up to 4.18, which would be among the worst in baseball if he qualified.

Oakland infielder Nick Punto is likely to miss a third straight game due to a left calf strain, though he's expected to avoid the disabled list.

Torii Hunter is 4 for 7 against Milone while Ian Kinsler is batting .400 on an 11-game hitting streak.

Tigers continue to struggle in 10-0 loss at Oakland

May 27, 2014

By Josh Dubow/ Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. >> Drew Smyly got a little bewildered when the Oakland Athletics turned every mistake he made into a home run.

Kyle Blanks homered in his home debut at the Coliseum, Derek Norris capped Oakland's five-homer day with a grand slam and the A's snapped a season-long four-game losing streak with a 10-0 win over the Detroit Tigers on Monday.

"It was like, is this really happening?" Smyly said. "I felt good and I felt like I was making good pitches. Then I'd just leave one up, home run. Leave the next one up, home run. Bury the next one, home run."

Smyly (2-3) allowed the first four long balls as the Tigers opened a seven-game road trip by losing for the seventh time in eight games.

Detroit has a 7.51 ERA during that skid as their much-vaunted pitching staff has hit a collective lull.

"I'm not really puzzled," manager Brad Ausmus said. "It's pretty clear cut. We're just not pitching well."

Brandon Moss and Josh Donaldson each hit their 12th home run and Yoenis Cespedes also went deep for the A's, who broke out of their recent slump by getting homers from five players for the first time since 2009.

That backed another strong start from Tommy Milone (3-3), who allowed four hits in 6 2-3 scoreless innings to improve to 3-0 with a 1.03 ERA in his past four starts after making an adjustment to shorten his stride.

"I think it's really helped with my command," Milone said. "I think that's the biggest thing I've seen from before and now is command with the fastball and keeping everything low in the zone."

Oakland returned home mired in its worst skid of the season, having scored seven runs in the four losses, to Tampa Bay and Toronto.

That led to a pregame message on the clubhouse white board imploring the team to take the "slow torture" approach of grinding out at-bats rather than the "instant kill" of a home run that ends a rally rather than starts one.

"Homers can be rally killers, but when you end up hitting four or five of them on the day you can probably make a different statement," Norris said.

Oakland responded with homers from five players for the first time since Jack Cust, Kurt Suzuki, Mark Ellis, Daric Barton and Cliff Pennington did it Sept. 11, 2009, at Minnesota.

That helped them win the first meeting of the season against the team that eliminated them in Game 5 of the division series the past two postseasons.

After squandering a prime scoring chance in the first inning when Oakland put runners on first and third with no outs, the A's got to Smyly with the long ball.

Moss got it started with a drive that hit off the glove of a leaping Austin Jackson and went over the center-field fence in the second inning.

"He almost came up with it," Ausmus said. "Unfortunately for us it snapped out of his glove. Part of me thinks it might have changed the course of the game, but we'll never know."

Two batters later, Blanks hit a no-doubt shot to left-center for his first home run since being acquired before the start of the team's recent nine-game road trip.

Oakland wasn't done, getting back-to-back shots from Donaldson and Cespedes in the third inning to take a 4-0 lead to the delight of the third sellout crowd of the season at the Coliseum.

Norris hit his first career grand slam in the eighth off Phil Coke in a rally helped by a catcher's interference call against Bryan Holaday and an error by third baseman Nick Castellanos.

NOTES: Smyly was the first Tigers pitcher to allow four homers in a game since Max Scherzer did it in a 10-7 win over the Yankees on April 3, 2011. ... Miguel Cabrera started at 1B for the Tigers a day after leaving early with a right hamstring cramp. 2B Ian Kinsler got the day off. ... Scherzer (6-1) starts for Detroit on Tuesday against Sonny Gray (5-1) in a matchup of two of the top starters in baseball.

LAST UPDATED: TUE, MAY 27, 2014, 01:34 EDT

TUESDAY, MAY 27, 2014

TEAM	PLAYER	TRANSACTION
New York Mets	Jose Valverde	Released

New York Mets	Vic Black	Called Up from Minors
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MONDAY, MAY 26, 2014

TEAM	PLAYER	TRANSACTION
Atlanta Braves	Kameron Loe	Signed to a Minor League Contract

Boston Red Sox	Ryan Lavarney	Called Up from Minors
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Boston Red Sox	Steven Wright	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation
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Chicago Cubs	Justin Ruggiano	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Strained left hamstring)
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Chicago Cubs	Ryan Kalish	Sent to Minors
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Houston Astros	Robbie Grossman	Called Up from Minors
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Houston Astros	L.J. Hoes	Sent to Minors
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Kansas City Royals	Omar Infante	Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment
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Kansas City Royals	Omar Infante	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Disc irritation, lower back)
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Kansas City Royals	Casey Coleman	Sent to Minors
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Los Angeles Dodgers	A.J. Ellis	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Right ankle sprain)
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Los Angeles Dodgers	Tim Federowicz	Called Up from Minors
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Milwaukee Brewers Irving Falu Purchased From Minors

Minnesota Twins Josh Willingham Removed From 15-Day DL, (Hairline fracture, left wrist)

New York Mets Eric Young Placed on 15-Day DL, (Strained right hamstring)

New York Mets Matt den Dekker Called Up from Minors

Pittsburgh Pirates Vin Mazzaro Designated for Assignment

Pittsburgh Pirates Brandon Cumpton Called Up from Minors

St. Louis Cardinals Pedro Feliciano Signed to a Minor League Contract

Tampa Bay Rays Alex Colome Sent to Minors

Tampa Bay Rays Alex Colome Called Up from Minors

Tampa Bay Rays Brandon Guyer Placed on 15-Day DL, (Fractured left thumb)

Toronto Blue Jays Melky Mesa Traded From from Royals, Kansas City (for cash considerations)

Toronto Blue Jays P.J. Walters Traded From from Royals, Kansas City (for cash considerations)

SUNDAY, MAY 25, 2014

TEAM	PLAYER	TRANSACTION
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Arizona Diamondbacks	Zeke Spruill	Return of 26th man
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Arizona Diamondbacks	Zeke Spruill	Called Up from Minors, (recalled as 26th roster player)
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Baltimore Orioles	Chris Davis	Placed on Paternity Leave List
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Baltimore Orioles	Steve Lombardozzi	Sent to Minors
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Baltimore Orioles	Preston Guilmet	Called Up from Minors
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Boston Red Sox	Brandon Workman	Called Up from Minors
Boston Red Sox	Alex Wilson	Sent to Minors
Boston Red Sox	Mike Napoli	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Sprained left ring finger)
Chicago Cubs	Manny Ramirez	Signed to a Minor League Contract
Chicago White Sox	Frank Francisco	Refused Minor League Assignment - Free Agent
Cincinnati Reds	Mat Latos	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation
Kansas City Royals	Michael Mariot	Called Up from Minors
Kansas City Royals	Francisco Pena	Sent to Minors
Los Angeles Angels	Ian Stewart	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation
Los Angeles Angels	Matt Shoemaker	Sent to Minors
Los Angeles Angels	Wade LeBlanc	Purchased From Minors
Milwaukee Brewers	Jeff Bianchi	Outrighted to Minors
Milwaukee Brewers	Jimmy Nelson	Sent to Minors
Milwaukee Brewers	Jimmy Nelson	Called Up from Minors
Minnesota Twins	Chris Herrmann	Sent to Minors
Minnesota Twins	Chris Colabello	Sent to Minors
Minnesota Twins	Oswaldo Arcia	Called Up from Minors
Minnesota Twins	Josh Willingham	Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment
New York Mets	Travis d'Arnaud	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation

New York Mets Vic Black Called Up from Minors, (recalled as 26th roster player)

New York Mets Vic Black Return of 26th man

Philadelphia Phillies Justin De Fratus Called Up from Minors

Philadelphia Phillies Cody Asche Placed on 15-Day DL, (Strained left hamstring)

San Diego Padres Tommy Medica Called Up from Minors

San Diego Padres Blaine Boyer Designated for Assignment

San Diego Padres Billy Buckner Designated for Assignment

Toronto Blue Jays Hector Gimenez Traded From from White Sox, Chi. White Sox (for cash considerations)

Washington Nationals Adam LaRoche Removed From 15-Day DL, (Strained right quad)

Washington Nationals Adam LaRoche Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment

SATURDAY, MAY 24, 2014

TEAM	PLAYER	TRANSACTION
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Baltimore Orioles	Nick Hundley	Traded From from Padres, San Diego (with cash for LHP Troy Patton)
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Baltimore Orioles	Steve Lombardozzi	Called Up from Minors
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Boston Red Sox	Daniel Nava	Called Up from Minors
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Boston Red Sox	Shane Victorino	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Strained right hamstring)
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Chicago White Sox	Frank Francisco	Outrighted to Minors
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Cleveland Indians	Mike Zagurski	Released
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Colorado Rockies	Josh Rutledge	Called Up from Minors
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Colorado Rockies	Nolan Arenado	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Fractured left middle finger)
Houston Astros	Brett Oberholtzer	Called Up from Minors
Los Angeles Dodgers	Robert Carson	Signed to a Minor League Contract
Los Angeles Dodgers	Jhan Marinez	Signed to a Minor League Contract
Miami Marlins	Dan Jennings	Called Up from Minors
Miami Marlins	Brad Hand	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Sprained right ankle)
Philadelphia Phillies	Luis Garcia	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Strained right forearm)
Philadelphia Phillies	David Buchanan	Purchased From Minors
San Diego Padres	Billy Buckner	Purchased From Minors
Seattle Mariners	James Paxton	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation
St. Louis Cardinals	Sam Freeman	Called Up from Minors
St. Louis Cardinals	Kevin Siegrist	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Strained left forearm)
Texas Rangers	Tanner Scheppers	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation
Toronto Blue Jays	Esmil Rogers	Outrighted to Minors
Toronto Blue Jays	Mickey Storey	Signed to a Minor League Contract
Washington Nationals	Zach Walters	Sent to Minors

FRIDAY, MAY 23, 2014

TEAM	PLAYER	TRANSACTION
Baltimore Orioles	T.J. McFarland	Called Up from Minors

Baltimore Orioles	Preston Guilmet	Sent to Minors
Boston Red Sox	Alex Wilson	Called Up from Minors
Boston Red Sox	Stephen Drew	Sent to Minors
Cincinnati Reds	Donald Lutz	Called Up from Minors
Cincinnati Reds	Neftali Soto	Sent to Minors
Cleveland Indians	Jason Kipnis	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation
Detroit Tigers	Corey Knebel	Purchased From Minors
Houston Astros	Rudy Owens	Called Up from Minors
Houston Astros	Rudy Owens	Sent to Minors
Kansas City Royals	Justin Maxwell	Outrighted to Minors
Kansas City Royals	Omar Infante	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation
Los Angeles Angels	Efren Navarro	Sent to Minors
Los Angeles Angels	Sean Burnett	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Recovery from left elbow surgery)
Los Angeles Angels	Sean Burnett	Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment
Milwaukee Brewers	Jim Henderson	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation
Pittsburgh Pirates	Tony Sanchez	Sent to Minors
Pittsburgh Pirates	Russell Martin	Reinstated From League Suspension
Pittsburgh Pirates	Jason Grilli	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Left oblique strain)
Seattle Mariners	Logan Morrison	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation

St. Louis Cardinals Joey Butler Signed to Play in Japan, (Orix Buffaloes)

St. Louis Cardinals Joey Butler Released

Texas Rangers Donnie Murphy Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment

Texas Rangers Prince Fielder Placed on 15-Day DL, (Neck surgery - out for season)

Texas Rangers Donnie Murphy Removed From 15-Day DL, (Strained neck)

Toronto Blue Jays Esmil Rogers Designated for Assignment

Toronto Blue Jays Liam Hendriks Called Up from Minors

THURSDAY, MAY 22, 2014

TEAM	PLAYER	TRANSACTION
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Baltimore Orioles	Tommy Hunter	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Left groin strain)
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Baltimore Orioles	Preston Guilmet	Called Up from Minors
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Chicago White Sox	Chris Sale	Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment
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Chicago White Sox	Chris Sale	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Flexor muscle strain)
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Chicago White Sox	Frank Francisco	Designated for Assignment
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Cleveland Indians	Mark Lowe	Purchased From Minors
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Cleveland Indians	Nyjer Morgan	Transferred to 60-Day DL, (Sprained right knee)
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Cleveland Indians	Zach McAllister	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Lower back strain)
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Cleveland Indians	Kyle Crockett	Sent to Minors
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Cleveland Indians	T.J. House	Called Up from Minors
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Detroit Tigers	Robbie Ray	Sent to Minors
Houston Astros	Josh Zeid	Sent to Minors
Houston Astros	Alex White	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation
Kansas City Royals	Jimmy Paredes	Called Up from Minors
Los Angeles Angels	Josh Hamilton	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation
Los Angeles Angels	Josh Wall	Called Up from Minors, - Not to Report
Los Angeles Dodgers	Miguel Olivo	Released
Miami Marlins	Chris Hatcher	Purchased From Minors
Miami Marlins	Rafael Furcal	Transferred to 60-Day DL, (Strained left hamstring)
Minnesota Twins	Sam Fuld	Transferred to 15-Day DL, (Concussion-like symptoms)
Pittsburgh Pirates	Russell Martin	Starting to Serve Suspension
Pittsburgh Pirates	Russell Martin	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Strained left hamstring)
Pittsburgh Pirates	Josh Wall	Sent to Minors
Pittsburgh Pirates	Phil Irwin	Designated for Assignment
Pittsburgh Pirates	Josh Wall	Acquired Off Waivers From from Angels, Los Angeles
Pittsburgh Pirates	Wandy Rodriguez	Designated for Assignment
San Diego Padres	Robbie Erlin	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Left elbow soreness)
San Diego Padres	Blaine Boyer	Purchased From Minors
San Francisco Giants	George Kontos	Called Up from Minors

San Francisco Giants	Santiago Casilla	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Strained right hamstring)
Tampa Bay Rays	Alex Cobb	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Strained left oblique - out 4-6 weeks)
Tampa Bay Rays	Alex Cobb	Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment
Washington Nationals	Adam LaRoche	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation
Washington Nationals	Blake Treinen	Called Up from Minors
WEDNESDAY, MAY 21, 2014		
TEAM	PLAYER	TRANSACTION
Boston Red Sox	Stephen Drew	Signed as Free Agent, (2014)(one-year contract)
Boston Red Sox	Felix Doubront	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Strained left shoulder)
Chicago White Sox	Jeff Keppinger	Released
Cincinnati Reds	Joey Votto	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Strained left quadriceps)
Cincinnati Reds	Matt Maloney	Signed to a Minor League Contract
Cincinnati Reds	Jay Bruce	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Torn meniscus, left knee)
Kansas City Royals	Mike Moustakas	Sent to Minors
Los Angeles Angels	Kole Calhoun	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Sprained right ankle - out 4-6 weeks)
Los Angeles Angels	Hector Santiago	Sent to Minors
Los Angeles Angels	Kole Calhoun	Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment
Los Angeles Dodgers	Erisbel Arruebarrena	Called Up from Minors
Los Angeles Dodgers	Hyun-jin Ryu	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Left shoulder inflammation)

Los Angeles Dodgers Juan Uribe Placed on 15-Day DL, (Strained right hamstring)

Los Angeles Dodgers Chris Withrow Sent to Minors

Miami Marlins Carlos Marmol Cleared Waivers and Became a Free Agent

Miami Marlins Anthony DeSclafani Sent to Minors

Philadelphia Phillies Cliff Lee Placed on 15-Day DL, (Strained left elbow)

Philadelphia Phillies Darin Ruf Called Up from Minors

St. Louis Cardinals Shane Robinson Called Up from Minors

Tampa Bay Rays Kevin Kiermaier Sent to Minors

Texas Rangers J.P. Arencibia Called Up from Minors, - Not to Report

Texas Rangers J.P. Arencibia Outrighted to Minors

Washington Nationals Ryan Mattheus Sent to Minors