



Detroit Tigers Clips

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Oakland 3, Detroit 1: Tigers closer Joe Nathan unable to finish off Anibal Sanchez's gem

May 29, 2014

By Shawn Windsor / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND, CALIF. — Anibal Sanchez said he felt fine when Brad Ausmus pulled him in favor of Joe Nathan in the ninth inning Wednesday night at O.co Coliseum as the Detroit Tigers held a 1-0 lead with one out and a runner on first.

Sanchez also said it he thought it was a good move, even though Nathan gave up a three-run, walk-off homer as the A's beat the Tigers, 3-1, and even though Sanchez had given up no runs and only three hits in 8 1/3 innings. He acknowledged the decision looked bad because of the loss. He also said at that point, it's a good idea to bring in a fresh closer.

"My pitch count was high (a season-high 111)," he said. "(Ausmus) was probably a little concerned. It was my third game after being on the DL."

If Sanchez sounded like he was contradicting himself, well, he wasn't. He surely felt fine. And his pitch count was high. And a closer should be able to come in and finish a game with a runner on second and one out. Nathan couldn't. It wasn't the first time this season.

His performance so far this season has been somewhat uneven, at least measured against his own stellar standards. Last year, he blew three saves — he converted 43 of 46 chances. This year, he's already blown four. Last year, he gave up two home runs. This season, he's given up four.

Nathan said he wished the team could've finished the win after Sanchez had thrown the best outing by a Tigers starter all year. What he didn't do was take responsibility for giving up the home run to Josh Donaldson, who bombed a first-pitch slider into left-field seats.

He blamed Nick Castellanos. Not by name, but by implying that when Castellanos' misplayed a line-drive from John Jaso, it hindered his chances of saving the game.

Castellanos, for his part, said the ball was catchable and that it hit his glove. When he didn't, the ball scooted into the outfield. Coco Crisp took third. Jaso was safe at first. Donaldson stepped to the plate with one out and runners at the corners.

A lot different, said Nathan, than two outs and a runner at second.

True.

But also true that the slider he threw to Donaldson didn't snap down far enough and the A's third baseman blasted it.

Nathan said the misplay at third forced him to challenge Donaldson in a way he didn't want to, one of the A's best hitters.

"The big out there was getting Jaso," Nathan said. "You get him and it changes everything, it gives me a chance to play with (Donaldson) a little bit."

Nathan said it put him in a tough spot, and repeated the line several times during his post-game interview. His manager agreed.

"If Nick catches that ball, maybe it's a different inning," said Ausmus.

If might have been a different inning, too, had Ausmus left Sanchez in to pitch to Jaso and Donaldson. Or it might not have.

Whatever chance he had of completing the game disappeared when he took eight pitches to get pinch-hitter Alberto Callaspo to ground out to second.

Had he gotten the leadoff man more efficiently to begin the ninth then Ausmus might have given him a chance after the double to Crisp.

"That was a slider away," Sanchez said of the ball Crisp hit. "I left it up a little."

Crisp ripped the ball hard down the opposite-field line. Ausmus said whether Crisp had blooped a single or smacked a double Sanchez's night would've been done.

But what a night it was. Lost in the gloom of the ninth-inning collapse was a dominant performance for Sanchez, who used four pitches, mixed speeds and moved his fastball from one side of the plate to the other.

"Sanchie was outstanding," said Ausmus. "He said he felt good."

So good he wanted to give him a chance to close out the game in the ninth — the Tigers took the lead on a Torii Hunter homer in the fourth inning.

“(Sanchez) was right at 100 pitches. He had some room with his pitch count,” said Ausmus. “But that one at-bat (Callapso) was a long at-bat. That kind of hurt his chances.”

Since returning from the disabled list, Sanchez has given up four runs in 20 innings over three starts.

“I tried to put the ball down,” he said of his approach against the A’s. “I feel good.”

The Tigers finally got the outing from a starter it needed. It just didn’t get one from its closer.

Detroit Tigers' Austin Jackson experiencing 'a little bit of a funk' at plate

May 29, 2014

By Shawn Windsor / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND — Austin Jackson looked as if the off-season tweaks in his approach at the plate were making a difference in April. The Tigers centerfielder hit .307 in April.

Then May arrived, and Jackson began to struggle. He's hit .217 this month. Most troubling is his average when runners are in scoring position so far this season.

He is 5-for-37 with runners in scoring position. He drove in a run last Tuesday night only because he beat out a double-play at first.

Brad Ausmus figured he could use a day off. He penciled in J.D. Martinez in his place in the lineup Wednesday. Rajai Davis will play center and Martinez will play left.

Ausmus said Jackson isn't doing anything differently at the plate now than he was in April.

"Nothing gross (anyway)," he said. "He is just in a little bit of a funk."

The Tigers manager said he doesn't think Jackson's performance in May foreshadows the sort of year he will have. Ausmus was already thinking about finding a way to get Martinez another start — he played Tuesday — and had been wanting to give Jackson a rest.

Martinez doubled Tuesday and drew a walk in the eighth inning that turned into a run — Davis pinch-ran and took second on a passed ball and stole third. The steal was particularly electric and overshadowed how critical Martinez's walk was.

"(Martinez) is swinging the bat well," said Ausmus.

He is hitting .280 this season on 50 at-bats, slugging .500 and has an .851 OPS.

Oakland 3, Detroit 1: Why the Tigers lost Wednesday

May 29, 2014

By Shawn Windsor / Detroit Free Press

At O.Co Coliseum, Oakland, Calif.

■ **WHAT HAPPENED:** Anibal Sanchez pitched eight shutout innings before giving way to closer Joe Nathan in the ninth. He gave up a three-run, walk-off homer to Josh Donaldson. Torii Hunter hit a homer in the fourth but the Tigers never seriously threatened after that, managing only six hits off Oakland starter Scott Kazmir, a lefty who kept Detroit's hitters off-balance all night — his pitch count was even more efficient than Sanchez's.

■ **PITCHING, SURE. BUT HOW ABOUT THE OFFENSE:** The Tigers have scored one run and zero runs in two of the three games in Oakland and the bottom half of the order continues to struggle. None of the bottom four hitters in the lineup got on base.

■ **FORGET THE LEGS, HOW ABOUT THE GLOVE:** Rajai Davis made two nifty plays in center starting for Austin Jackson, including a running catch in the leftfield gap to save a double. Davis also had two hits. He suffered a shoulder bruise though and was pulled during the seventh. Jackson's day off didn't last a day. Brad Ausmus said the shoulder would be fine.

■ **POWER RETURNING:** Miguel Cabrera hit one off the wall in the top of the ninth. He tried to take second but got tagged as he slid. The ump called him safe. Replays showed otherwise. The aggressive attempt made sense with two outs and Victor Martinez on deck, said Ausmus. That was Cabrera's lone hit on the night but hit the ball hard and deep every at-bat — just missing a home run that ran a few feet foul of the leftfield pole.

■ **OH, THAT BULLPEN:** Nathan entered the ninth with a runner on second and one out. When Nick Castellanos couldn't handle a line drive hit to him, that put runners at the corners. Donaldson took advantage of a Nathan slider that didn't slide quite enough. It was Nathan's fourth blown save of the season.

THREE STARS: Donaldson; Sanchez; Kazmir.

Miguel Cabrera: The real Yankees Killer?

May 29, 2014

By Detroit Free Press Staff / Detroit Free Press

Who's a Tiger killer? Sportsonearth.com's Matthew Kory picked every team's nemesis. A few nuggets from it:

TIGERS: BOBBY BONILLA

Really? Mostly a National Leaguer, he hit .448 in 105 bats against the Tigers. Not bad, but what about ...

CARDINALS: JIM THOME

He's the flip side. He hit .430 in limited games against St. Louis, but 66 HRs and 154 RBIs in 221 games against Detroit.

YANKEES: MIGUEL CABRERA

In 46 games against the Yankees, Cabrera has hit .373 with 18 homers and 44 RBIs. And there's more to come.

BABE RUTH

The Bambino was listed as the nemesis of three teams: the cursed Red Sox, of course, plus the Indians and White Sox.

REPEAT OFFENDERS

Two players picked on four teams: Barry Bonds (Reds, Marlins, Brewers, A's) and Mark McGwire (Cubs, Rockies, Padres, Giants).

Shawn Windsor: Detroit Tigers' skid described as 'weird' and 'seven days from hell'

May 29, 2014

By Shawn Windsor / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND — Torii Hunter has a tidy little description for his team's recent struggles.

"This?" he said, nearly chuckling when asked about the stretch of double-digit losses and walk-off balks, "it's weird. It's been seven days from hell."

Technically, it's been eight days, but then who's counting?

Probably not anyone hanging around in hell. It's hot there, I hear. Besides, the length of a week was constructed in a slightly cooler place, where it's easier to ponder the details.

Like how the Detroit Tigers, heading into Tuesday night, had lost seven of eight and had given up 56 runs in their last six games. And how these games came on the heels of an 11-game road winning streak, a march that carried the Tigers to the best record in baseball. It's hard to fathom such dominance followed by such ineptitude.

As Hunter said, it's weird.

He also said it's scary.

Not that he hasn't seen losing streaks before. He has. And while on good teams, too — he played for both the Twins and the Angels.

Even the Oakland A's, who beat the Tigers, 10-0, Monday afternoon, entered that game on a four-game losing streak. But those losses were by 3-1 or 3-2 or 5-2, not 12-2 and 12-4.

"That's baseball," Hunter said of the losses.

In other words, that's expected. The best teams lose 60 games or more a year. Fine.

But this?

"It's not a skid," he said.

It's nearly inexplicable.

Hunter's best guess is that a couple of pitchers had off days and it grew from there. He knows the offense has not been great but has scored enough runs in several of these losses to win.

"It's all mental," he said, speaking of the dynamics of a clubhouse, and how easy it is for a team to spill from one corner to the next. "You are so closely knit. When someone is tired, everybody is gonna get tired. If there is a sickness in the clubhouse, everybody is gonna get sick."

Hunter said the best teams are often like families, that they survive not just on talent but on chemistry and camaraderie.

"We are so close," he said, "just like your family. One kid gets sick, the others do, too. Same thing happens on the field (with us)."

Right now it's the pitchers — and several of the hitters, including Hunter, who has cooled off after a blistering start to the season.

"We've been hit," he said, "all of us."

So what can be done?

"This is a veteran ball club," he explained. "We've been around. We've seen some failure. We will make the adjustment. Every day come in and do some things to kind of get this ball rolling."

Manager Brad Ausmus addressed the team Sunday back in Detroit. He said he had no message Monday, other than to remain the same and keep moving forward.

Ausmus knows he has a roster that has seen many things over the course of a season. He understands that veterans like Hunter know this is part of surviving a six-month season.

But even the savviest players fight themselves during stretches like this.

"When you are hot, you don't think. You don't work on mechanics. You just go out and play and it's fun," he said.

And when you get beat 10-0, for what seems like forever ... or at least for a week?

"You can start over-thinking, so you start working a little harder to figure it out, and maybe you start thinking about your mechanics in the field, and that's when you get in trouble," Hunter said.

He doesn't think this team is there yet. One good outing, one timely hit, and the winning starts. The fun returns. The clubhouse finds its level.
"I think we are OK," he said.
I think he's right.
For now.

Athletics foil Anibal Sanchez's gem with walk-off victory against Tigers

May 29, 2014

By Tom Gage / The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif. — Now where did that masterpiece go? It was here a moment ago.

As is often the sequence in stunning losses, for the want of an out, the advantage was lost.

For the want of the advantage, there went the game.

When and where did you get the first bad feeling about Wednesday night's 3-1 Tigers' loss to the Oakland A's?

The biggest bad feeling, of course, came when Josh Donaldson drove a Joe Nathan slider far over the fence in left with one out in the bottom of the ninth for a game-deciding home run.

But there were uh-oh moments leading up to Donaldson's blast as the A's ninth inning didn't look like the first eight in any way.

Anibal Sanchez had been magnificent through the eighth, so much so that with a pitch count of only 100, he was allowed to go back out and try to nail down a complete game.

It would have been the first of the season for the Tigers.

But as you know by now, it wasn't.

Sanchez took a 1-0 lead to the mound with him in the ninth, Torii Hunter's eighth home run in the fourth still standing as the only run of the game.

And while manager Brad Ausmus said "it was only a one-run game, and one-run games aren't guaranteed" it looked as if Sanchez had it well in hand.

"He said he felt good," said Ausmus, "and had pitched very well. He'd had everything working."

The first at-bat of the bottom of the ninth was an extended one for pinch-hitter Alberto Callaspo. He ended up grounding out routinely to Ian Kinsler at second, but it took nine pitches for him to do so — including seven after Sanchez had pulled ahead with a 0-2 count.

With Nathan warming up by then, Sanchez knew he'd probably not stay in the game if the A's put a runner on — which turned out to be true when Coco Crisp doubled to left with one out.

"Even if it had been a bloop to left, that probably would have been it," Ausmus said.

Was that the first uh-oh moment?

Enter Nathan with the tying run on second.

Or was that?

Even Ausmus called it a "tough spot (for Joe) with no margin for error. But that's part of the game I guess."

Nathan was very frank about what kind of welcome can await a closer after an effective starter has been knocked from a game.

"I think we've seen a lot of times that when someone comes in from the 'pen after a guy has been throwing so well, the other team kind of takes a breath and says, 'at least we got him out of the game,' " he said.

"That's also one of those spots where you want a starter to get it done because of how well threw the ball."

What happened next is that on a 2-2 count after 0-2, John Jaso hit a liner to third that had to be caught, and looked like it was going to be, but wasn't.

Instead of the second out, or even a game-ending double-play if somehow Crisp could have been doubled up at second, the ball got past Nick Castellanos for a single that resulted in a first-and-third threat.

"Maybe if Nick catches that ball, it's a different inning," Ausmus said. "It was kind of a change-up, so his depth perception was thrown off."

Castellanos admitted the ball should have been caught, though.

"It was moving a little bit, but definitely a catchable ball," he said. "It caught the tip of my glove."

Nathan said it changed everything.

"That was the big out, getting Jaso. I think it would have changed a lot of what that inning ended up being.

"It changes how you can pitch to (Donaldson). It gives me a chance to play with him a little bit," Nathan said.

"When we didn't get him, it puts you in a tough spot.

"It kind of forces me to go after one of the better hitters in their lineup."

Donaldson went deep on a first-pitch slider that clearly wasn't where Nathan wanted it to be. The long drive flirted momentarily with hooking, but was hit too well for the Tigers realistically to hope it would go foul.

Instead of winning 1-0 with a praise for a pitching gem, the Tigers lost — but justifiably praised the gem all the same.

“Definitely the best outing of the year so far,” Castellanos said Sanchez, who allowed only three hits and struck out nine. “He pitched perfect.”

Around the horn

Rajai Davis exited with a bruised left shoulder after making a diving catch in center, “but we don’t think it’s anything long term,” Ausmus said.

Tigers weigh shortstop options Eugenio Suarez, Hernan Perez

May 29, 2014

By Lynn Henning / The Detroit News

Toledo — Exactly when the Tigers make their next move to dress up a position in need of a makeover is not the question.

It's a matter of who that next shortstop, probably a platoon option, might be.

The Tigers are evaluating, which is why front-office chief Dave Dombrowski and former manager Jim Leyland (now a Dombrowski adviser) were on hand at Toledo this week to scout not only the shortstop options (Eugenio Suarez and Hernan Perez) but undoubtedly some potential bullpen additions (Chad Smith and Pat McCoy, among others).

As for alternatives at shortstop, Suarez has the bat. He had another hit Wednesday in Toledo's 7-0 loss to Durham at Fifth Third Field. Suarez, 22, is hitting .393 in seven games in Toledo, which followed his .284 effort (and robust .850 OPS) in 42 games at Double A Erie.

He had a home run and a double in Tuesday's Mud Hens victory and would seem a tempting option for a Tigers team that has been screaming for a solid, everyday answer at short since Jose Iglesias was knocked from the roster in March with stress fractures in his lower legs.

Suarez is 5-foot-11 and 180 pounds and bats right-handed. He is a more comfortable shortstop who can play other infield positions, which makes him a neat complement to Perez, 23, the Mud Hens second baseman who has spent time with the Tigers in the past three seasons and is more suited to playing second.

Perez is 6-1 and 185, and also bats right-handed. He was hitting .243 after Wednesday's game with a soft .592 OPS, mostly due to only one home run and nine doubles in 50 games, which isn't going to help that OPS when his on-base average is an equally unremarkable .291.

And so the call should be easy. Even Mud Hens manager Larry Parrish said following Monday's game "the other guy's got some life in that bat," by which he meant Suarez.

But it isn't as easy as comparing offensive numbers when teams consider promoting a young shortstop from Triple A, as the Tigers appear to be doing now that the Andrew Romine-Danny Worth platoon pairing has been less than inspiring.

"Up there," Parrish said, speaking of Detroit, "there are certain plays you want made all the time.

"The other guy (Suarez) might make the better play, but big-league guys want to make that routine play every day. The other one (Perez) tends to be more consistent."

The Tigers also would prefer Suarez play regularly rather than, say, platoon with the left-handed-hitting Romine. Daily at-bats, as well as exposure to ground balls and relays, is the best means for turning a prospect shortstop into a player who can help regularly in Detroit.

And that reality, coupled with a big league team's dependency on steady defense at shortstop, is another reason the Tigers might leave Suarez in Toledo for the bulk of this season.

Kevin Bradshaw, roving minor league infield instructor for the Tigers, was at Monday's game, a 4-3 loss to Durham, during which Suarez handled his tasks minus any issues. But, perhaps tellingly, the best play made by a Mud Hens infielder was a deft stop by Perez on a one-hop rocket that knocked out a potentially big inning for the Bulls.

Suarez made seven errors in his 42-game rehearsal at Erie and has made a pair of miscues in his first seven games at Toledo.

"I've seen video of his errors," Bradshaw said, "and it seems as if it's routine plays. Routine plays to his right. We've got to figure out what's happening there — what might be going on with his footwork."

Suarez, like Perez, is from Venezuela, a country that represents the most consistent of all sources for Tigers organizational talent. He was signed in 2008, a year after Detroit had landed Perez's signature.

Suarez made 26 errors in 111 games at Erie in 2013, all while making the occasional play that would end up on some late-night sports show's highlights video.

But, again, it is consistency. And when Perez is regarded by Parrish as having an "above average arm" from shortstop, the Tigers front office is left to ponder which of the two players might help most as a team attempts to put more muscle into a position seriously weakened when Iglesias was lost.

Suarez is clearly ahead of Perez, offensively. But any comparison should note that Perez has at least played in the big leagues while Suarez hasn't tasted the reality of pitches at Comerica Park and at other stops where baseball's best staffs can often dissect a kid hitter.

Any evaluation also must acknowledge that Suarez is by no means helpless at short.

"Definitely, from an overall fundamental standpoint, he's been better with his throwing," Bradshaw said, referring to Suarez's improvement over past seasons. "He's quicker and more accurate. His range is good and getting better.

"It's a matter of understanding position, which for him is key. He's got to learn from pitch to pitch to concentrate."

With the Romine-Worth tandem leaving a team searching for a net gain on offense and defense, the Tigers are plainly considering their stock at Toledo, especially with July's trade deadline — and some necessary decisions on existing personnel — approaching.

Tigers pitcher Max Scherzer 'more frustrated' with latest outing

May 29, 2014

By Tom Gage / The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif. — For the Tigers, unfortunately, the answers procured by their 6-5 victory over the A's on Tuesday were not to questions being loudly asked.

Such as ...

* Can Rajai Davis steal third if the pitcher isn't looking?

Yes, it turned out, he can. And with the run set up by such a daring tie-game move in the eighth inning, the Tigers didn't add a ninth game to the eight that made up their 1-7 skid.

* Can the Tigers sound convincing by calling such a slump a "little funk?"

It depends on who is calling it a little funk, but Joe Nathan sounded convincing because he's been on many teams that have experienced them before.

"As bad as it's been for the last seven or eight days, you wouldn't know it by being around this clubhouse," Nathan said. "We have guys in here who've played for a number of years. I think everyone knows you're going to go through funks.

"It's not a time to panic. It's time to keep coming to the park."

But there was a loud question being asked that wasn't answered.

* When will Max Scherzer be himself again?

"I need to study myself and figure out what I must do to get better, and get some life back in my pitches," he said after allowing five runs in six innings.

In the grand scheme of things, especially since Davis said he might have to put his delayed steal of third on the shelf for a year so as to not overuse it, Scherzer's effectiveness is more of an issue than the next surprise up the Tigers baserunning sleeve.

That's two consecutive starts by Scherzer which can be suitably described as something other than good.

If they weren't outrightly bad, they were closer to that description than anything meaning acceptable.

It was admirable Scherzer left after the seventh inning instead of the five-run second in the first of the two sub-par starts.

Just as it was of some consolation he left after the sixth instead of the fourth when the A's took a 5-4 lead.

But the fact remains that for the first time since May 2011, Scherzer has allowed 12 runs in two combined starts.

And for the first time since September 2010, he has allowed 20 hits in two starts.

He's not been himself, in other words, according to what is now defined as Scherzer being himself.

So the question wasn't answered.

If anything, it got louder.

"I'm more frustrated with this one because I left more pitches up," Scherzer said. "I'm into more second-guessing about this one, and the pitches I threw.

"I feel I can pitch better, and I have to find a way to cut these walks out, as well. I hate walks. I hate 'em."

Because of how much more difficult it makes the task at hand.

"I was getting killed because I could not get the leadoff man out," he said. "They were always getting their leadoff man on, which meant I wasn't pitching with one out and nobody on.

"When you can get an early out, it just takes so much more to beat you. But I'm not executing pitches well enough to do it. I'll look at video, make a few tweaks and hope I'm better in my next start in Seattle."

As with the start in Cleveland, manager Brad Ausmus felt Scherzer "definitely got better as he went along.

"I always feel Max is going to be fine," Ausmus said. "Even when he gives up a couple of runs, I think he's going to be fine.

"His concentration is exceedingly high when he's on the mound. He's an intelligent, focused pitcher. He had some pitches that could have gone either way in big situations. But he gave us a chance to win."

Not as good as the chance he's been known to give his team for the better part of a few years now.

But a chance.

Rookie Nick Castellanos' newfound patience pays off for Tigers

May 29, 2014

By Tom Gage / The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif. — Lost in the brazen way Rajai Davis stole third on a toss back to the pitcher from the catcher to set up the winning run Tuesday was something else that happened in the eighth inning.

As a pinch hitter, Nick Castellanos walked. But it was while Castellanos was batting, and letting events evolve by showing some patience at the plate, that Davis as a pinch runner was able to take second on a passed ball before stealing third.

Had Castellanos put the ball in play early or made a routine out, Austin Jackson's grounder to short would have been the third out of the inning instead of the fielder's choice that allowed Davis to score the tiebreaker that held up as the winning run.

The walk, though, was noteworthy because it marked the fourth consecutive game in which Castellanos had walked, after four walks in his first 38 games.

But within the span of his last 13 plate appearances, it was his sixth walk.

What gives?

Castellanos has made an adjustment.

"I was swinging early and often," he said about the first two months of the season — or nearly two months.

"The league made an adjustment with me after I had some early success. I started getting a lot of pitches out of the strike zone early because I was swinging.

"But the point is to make them come to you," he said. "I'm being more relaxed up there, not jumping at early pitches."

To have four walks after his first 151 didn't seem right to Castellanos, who never considered himself as a non-walker.

And while it's true that in the minors, hitters like to get their hacks, which could explain some of his earlier stats — such as 14 walks in 341 plate appearances at Double A Erie in 2012 — the ratio seemed more normal when he walked 54 times in 595 plate appearances at Triple A Toledo last season.

It's difficult to make conclusions about a young hitter's sense of patience at the plate, however, while he's still in the minors.

And, of course, a young hitter wants to swing the bat when he suddenly finds himself in a major league lineup every day.

But smart hitters don't take long to adjust, and Castellanos, it appears, already is adjusting to the pitches he's being thrown.

"I've always had my fair share of walks," he said. "But I'm very aggressive around the plate."

The secret is how to effectively mix the two, which Castellanos seems to be doing.

Just missed

So instead of being angry that his double high off the wall in center had just missed being a two-run home run Tuesday night, catcher Alex Avila was smiling at second base.

Was it something being yelled out to him from the Tigers dugout that was making him laugh?

No, it was the exchange Avila was having with A's third baseman Josh Donaldson.

"When Donaldson came up after I had tried to bunt my way on, he asked me, 'Why were you bunting? I would have thrown you out,' " Avila said. "So when I looked over after my double, he was laughing because I had tried to bunt in my previous at-bat."

Avila isn't hesitant to square around if he thinks a team is giving him room to get one down. He's shown bunt three times already this season, "the most I've ever done it," he said.

But sometimes it works, too, when he swings away.

Around the horn

By the way, Avila believes the shift other teams are putting on for him has cost him "5-6 hits" already.

If it's five hits, it means the difference between the .274 he would be hitting and the .230 he is.

If shifts have cost him six hits, he would be hitting .283.

"Five or six hits make a big difference early in the year," Avila said.

Detroit Tigers need for speed: Ron LeFlore sees similarities 40 years apart

May 29, 2014

By Peter Wallner / MLive.com

COMSTOCK PARK, MI – The Detroit Tigers of 1973 weren't that different from the 2013 edition when it came to speed. Both were plodders.

This season, the Tigers have transformed their offense with the addition of outfielder Rajai Davis, who leads the American League with 16 stolen bases and whose presence has changed the makeup of a team that stole just 35 bases a year ago.

Ron LeFlore provided a similar spark 40 years ago.

When LeFlore arrived in 1974, the Tigers had previously stolen an American League-low 28 bases (in 58 attempts and 19 fewer than the next closest team) as baseball entered an era of speed. He ripped off 23 his first year in 60 games, the start of a nine-year career that included two stolen base titles. By his last season with Detroit, in 1979, the Tigers finished second with 176 steals, 78 of them from LeFlore.

LeFlore, who will appear at the West Michigan Whitecaps game on Friday, likes the change.

"Guys like this Davis kid make the Tigers a better team," LeFlore said. "There used to be so much more emphasis on base running and I wish teams would get back to that."

TIGER FRIDAYS

Ron LeFlore will appear at the West Michigan Whitecaps' 7 p.m. game Friday against Dayton. The first 1,000 fans will receive a living baseball card. Fireworks follow the game.

Here is the schedule for Tiger Fridays this season at Fifth Third Ballpark, with the give-away in parentheses:

- May 30 – Ron LeFlore (living baseball card)
- June 6 – Daryl Patterson (1968 team lithograph)
- June 27 – Glenn Wilson (living baseball card)
- July 18 – Mickey Stanley (bobblehead doll)
- Aug. 1 – Tom Brookens & Steve Garvey (1984 commemorative T-shirt)
- Aug. 22 – Craig Monroe (bobblehead doll)

That is hardly a surprise statement from someone who wreaked havoc on the base paths for six seasons with the Tigers from 1974-79. LeFlore finds the mindset of the current Tigers team interesting.

"It's being aggressive that I like from them," he said. "I think Brad Ausmus is going to be a good manager. You have to have confidence and you have to be aggressive and not be afraid to be aggressive or get thrown out sometimes."

The Tigers this season are second in the American League in stolen bases. Besides Davis, Ian Kinsler and Austin Jackson have six each. The team is also second in caught stealing with 17.

LeFlore averaged 67 steals a season during his career, which was highlighted by 97 swipes in his lone year with the Montreal Expos in 1980. He was caught an average of 21 times a season.

LeFlore provided MLB with a terrific storyline in the 1970s. A former heroin user and high school dropout from Detroit, he served time in state prison for armed robbery. He was discovered by then-Tigers manager Billy Martin, who helped arrange a tryout at Tiger Stadium that led to his signing.

Within a year, he was with the Tigers. Eventually a movie, "One in a Million: The Ron LeFlore Story" was made about his life and career.

Without much baseball experience in general, LeFlore said he stole bases with speed and by studying others.

"Nobody helped me out at all," he said. "The only help I got was from talking to Maury Wills and Lou Brock and guys like that. Who in Detroit organization ever stole bases? So I really learned on my own."

LeFlore's life after baseball was interesting, too. He worked as a baggage handler at an airport, tried his hand at umpiring and coaching, played in the brief senior baseball league and was arrested twice for non-payment of child support.

Now 65 and living in St. Petersburg, Fla. for the past 18 years, LeFlore lost his right leg to arterial vascular disease in 2011, the result of smoking cigarettes since a teen, he said. He also had a hip replacement.

“Sometimes I’ll be watching a game and I’ll see a guy steal a base and I’ll think, ‘My god, I used to do that, too.’ But I look down at my leg and think, ‘But I can’t do that anymore.’ But it’s alright. It is just an adjustment you have to make getting older.”

Analysis: Joe Nathan, Nick Castellanos contribute to walk-off loss, interesting postgame session

May 29, 2014

By Chris Iott / MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- There are plenty of points to analyze. Plenty of places for fans to place blame. Plenty of storylines -- some new, some recycled -- to dwell upon following the 3-1 loss the Detroit Tigers suffered Wednesday night to the Oakland Athletics. But let's try to sum things up as succinctly as possible first.

Anibal Sanchez and Scott Kazmir were fantastic. Nick Castellanos and Joe Nathan were not.

Joe Nathan Detroit Tigers closer Joe Nathan heads off the field Wednesday night after surrendering a walk-off home run to Josh Donaldson in a 3-1 loss to the Oakland Athletics. AP Photo

Plenty of fans will blame Detroit Tigers manager Brad Ausmus for the dramatic loss to the A's. He removed Sanchez with a shutout intact after Sanchez surrendered a one-out double in the ninth inning to Coco Crisp with his season-high 111th pitch of the game.

But removing Sanchez at that point seems like a solid decision. Sanchez can be amazingly effective when he has all his pitches working. He was excellent Wednesday night. But he also tends to fade after he passes the 100-pitch mark.

Anibal Sanchez mug Anibal Sanchez

Ausmus gave him the chance to complete the game when he sent him out to start the ninth inning. But due to the 1-0 score and the climbing pitch count, there was no margin for error. The plan was to leave Sanchez in -- assuming his pitch count didn't get amazingly high -- as long as he didn't allow a runner to reach base. When Crisp reached, that was the end of the line.

"That probably would have been it either way, even if it had been a bloop to left," Ausmus said. "We had Joe getting ready in case someone got on."

Sanchez said he felt good. Of course, it's tough to get a read from that. Most starting pitchers want to stay in the game no matter what. Sanchez also said he understood why Ausmus took him out. He had thrown a season high in pitches and was just three starts in from a stint on the disabled list. The Tigers gave Nathan a ton of money in the offseason for these type of spots.

That's when the game took an odd turn. Nathan entered with one out in the ninth to face John Jaso, who responded by hitting a line drive toward third base. The ball was clearly catchable. It wasn't caught. It deflected off the glove of Nick Castellanos and into left field for a single.

That left runners on first and third with one out and Josh Donaldson stepping in. The margin for error was reduced, but it was already thin prior to the misplay by Castellanos. Either way, Nathan couldn't afford to just avoid Donaldson and his 12 home runs. Not with Brandon Moss and his 12 home runs waiting in the on-deck circle.

Donaldson eliminated the margin for error and an absolute gem by Sanchez with one swing of the bat when he smashed a first-pitch slider from Nathan over the wall in left field.

The scene in the clubhouse unfolded in a bit of an odd manner, too. One would expect Nathan to make a cursory mention of the ball that eluded Castellanos and then focus on the home run that Donaldson hit. One would expect Castellanos to make a big deal out of the ball he missed and focus on how he put Nathan in a tough spot. Generally, players will heap the majority of the blame on themselves whether or not it's deserved. Nick Castellanos mug Nick Castellanos

But that's not what happened. Castellanos said the ball was catchable but didn't say much beyond that.

"I don't know what pitch it was, but it was moving a little bit," Castellanos said. "But it was definitely a catchable ball. It caught the tip of my glove. ... I guess (Jaso) kind of kept his hands inside the ball so it was kind of going that way."

Nathan spoke about the Jaso at-bat as the key at-bat in the inning right from the start of his postgame session with the media.

"The big out there was getting Jaso, I think," Nathan said. "You get him and it changes everything. It changes how your approach is against Donaldson. It changes how you can pitch to him. It gives me a chance to play

with him a little bit. When I guess we didn't get Jaso, it puts you in a tough spot. First and third. Real good hitter at the plate. It kind of forces me to go after one of the better hitters in the lineup. Like I said, Jaso was the out that we thought we had, but unfortunately it didn't happen."

Joe Nathan mug Joe Nathan

Nathan returned to that point multiple times.

"My focus is still on Donaldson," Nathan said. "Like I said though, it's a tough spot when you're first and third with one out as opposed to two outs, man on second. Like I said, the whole inning was Jaso."

The first pitch to Donaldson was a slider that landed well beyond the fence in left field. That gave the A's a walk-off win. With that win, they leapfrogged the Tigers for the best record in the American League. Scott Kazmir, who pitched to three batters more than the minimum while throwing a complete game, became the winner. Nathan took the loss.

When asked about the pitch to Donaldson and how it was executed, Nathan didn't have much to say.

"First-pitch slider," Nathan said. "Good hitter, you know. Good hitter. Looking for a pitch. Looked like he was guessing the same pitch I threw and put a pretty good swing on it."

What to make of that exchange? Tough to tell. But it is worth noting that it simply wasn't how one would normally expect the postgame conversations to go.

One thing everyone agreed on was that it was a shame that the Tigers lost the game when Sanchez had pitched so well.

"It sucks because we really wanted to win this one for Sanchez," Castellanos said. "It was definitely his best outing of the year so far. He pitched perfectly. To not be able to come up with a win for him is pretty unfortunate."

Nathan said pitchers in the bullpen always want the starter to pitch a complete game and finish off a shutout because of how special that can be.

"I wish we could have finished it for him," Nathan said. "I wish he could have finished it for himself. That would have been nice. But what a job he did."

Sanchez pitched impressively for 8 1/3 innings. He was in complete control until the double by Crisp and a high pitch count chased him from the game.

That's when things got interesting. Really interesting.

Detroit Tigers' Rajai Davis day to day after leaving game with left shoulder bruise

May 29, 2014

By Chris Iott / MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Rajai Davis made a nice diving catch in the second inning Wednesday night. But the catch prevented him from finishing the game.

Rajai Davis Rajai Davis makes a diving catch on a fly ball by Yoenis Cespedes in the second inning. Davis suffered a left shoulder contusion on the play and left the game in the seventh inning. AP Photo

Davis was replaced in center field by Austin Jackson in the seventh inning of his team's 3-1 loss to the Oakland Athletics. The Tigers announced late in the game that he had suffered a left shoulder contusion and is day to day.

"He's all right," Tigers manager Brad Ausmus said. "We don't think it's anything long term."

Davis saw plenty of action early in the game, which marked just his second start in center this season. Of the first seven outs recorded by Anibal Sanchez, five of them were on fly balls to center.

The third of those fly balls was hit by Yoenis Cespedes toward the gap in left-center. Davis covered plenty of ground to get there and made a nice diving catch for the second out of the second inning.

Davis didn't show any ill effects in the field or at the plate. He doubled off A's starter Scott Kazmir with two outs in the third inning and continued to play solidly in center.

Athletics 3, Tigers 1: Josh Donaldson hits walk-off home run off Joe Nathan

May 29, 2014

By Chris Iott / MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Anibal Sanchez was dominant. But the Detroit Tigers could not finish what he started. Sanchez came up just two outs short of a shutout Wednesday night, but Josh Donaldson hit a three-run home run off closer Joe Nathan to give the Oakland Athletics a 3-1 victory over the Tigers.

Torii Hunter homered for the Tigers.

Sanchez struck out nine and allowed just three hits in 8 1/3 innings. He left the game -- after throwing a season-high 111 pitches -- after Coco Crisp doubled with one out in the ninth inning.

John Jaso hit a line drive toward third base off Nathan that was certainly catchable, but it glanced off the glove of Nick Castellanos and into left field to put runners on the corners with one out in the ninth.

Donaldson followed with a mammoth home run to left field to give the A's the win.

A Tigers starter had made it past the second inning without allowing a run just once in the previous 10 games. A struggling starting rotation was the main reason the Tigers slumped and allowed a ton of runs in doing so. But Sanchez was sharp right from the first pitch in this one. He allowed one run on three hits and one walk. Sanchez struck out nine.

Sanchez allowed just four A's runners to reach base. He surrendered a walk to Josh Reddick in the third, a single by Josh Donaldson in the fourth, a double by Eric Sogard in the sixth and the double by Crisp in the ninth.

Scott Kazmir was extremely impressive for the A's. He allowed six hits, struck out eight and did not issue a walk while throwing a complete game. He pitched to just three batters more than the minimum.

Tigers' highlights

-- Rajai Davis made his second start of the season in center and was tested early. He had five of the first seven Tigers putouts, including a nice diving catch on a ball hit to left-center by Yoenis Cespedes for the second out of the second inning. Miguel Cabrera also made a nice defensive play when he made a diving catch on a line drive by Brandon Moss for the final out of the fourth.

-- Hunter put the Tigers on the scoreboard first when he hit a Kazmir offering just over the fence in right field with two outs in the fourth inning for a solo home run. It was the second home run in two days and the eighth of the season for Hunter.

Tigers' lowlights

-- Kazmir surrendered a two-out double to Davis in the third inning but struck out the other three batters he faced in the inning.

-- The Tigers struggled to string together hits against Kazmir. The Tigers did not have more than one hit in an inning and hit into double plays in the first and seventh innings.

Game notes

-- Both teams started to head off the field after J.D. Martinez was ruled out at first base to complete an inning-ending double play in the top of the second inning. But the Tigers challenged the call, and it was overturned after video review. Martinez then went to second on a wild pitch, but Alex Avila grounded out sharply to shortstop to end the inning.

-- Austin Jackson was not in the starting lineup for the Tigers but replaced Davis in center in the bottom of the seventh inning. Davis went 2 for 3 and is now 9 for 18 in his career against Kazmir. He left the game with a left shoulder contusion and is listed as day to day.

Brad Ausmus sees no key reason Austin Jackson has struggled: 'He's just in a little bit of a funk'

May 29, 2014

By Chris Iott / MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Austin Jackson has been a bit off this month. On Wednesday night, Jackson will get the night off. At least for the start of the game.

Detroit Tigers manager Brad Ausmus is starting Rajai Davis in center field in place of Jackson for the second time this season. Ausmus said it was simply a planned day off for Jackson, who has started 45 of 48 games heading into the game Wednesday night.

Austin Jackson mugAustin Jackson

Jackson started the 2014 season on a tear but has cooled off substantially in the month of May. Ausmus said he couldn't put his finger on one specific thing that might be holding Jackson back at the plate in recent weeks. Jackson doesn't appear to be back to using an exaggerated leg kick on his swing. He doesn't seem to be expanding the strike zone. He isn't striking out a ton, like he has in the past during rough stretches at the plate. In fact, Jackson has struck out just 31 times in 45 games this season, which is well below his career pace of about a strikeout per game.

"There's really nothing gross that he's doing," Ausmus said. "He's just in a little bit of a funk. April was a better month offensively, but I don't think May is indicative of the type of player he's going to be over the six-month season."

The Tigers need him to bounce back, although it's worth noting that Jackson's RBI and runs scored numbers have not dropped off substantially. He knocked in nine runs and scored 13 in 92 plate appearances in March/April and has knocked in eight and scored 10 in 100 plate appearances in May. Here are some raw numbers for Jackson by month as well as at home and on the road.

Monthly splits

March/April: .307 BA, .911 OPS

May: .217 BA, .575 OPS

Home/away splits

Home: .345 BA, .920 OPS

Away: .169 BA, .539 OPS

The home-away splits are drastic but also are hard to explain using any logical reasoning. Take Alex Avila, for example. His numbers at home were drastically better than on the road in 2013. In 2014, those numbers are reversed.

Jackson's numbers at home are better than his road numbers for his career, but the differences aren't nearly as drastic as they are this season. Part of the explanation might be simple. The Tigers played the majority of their games at home in April, when he was thriving. They have played most of their games on the road in May, when Jackson has struggled.

It is worth noting that, despite the poor May numbers, Jackson has been pretty good at the plate for the past week. He is 7-for-25 (.280) with two doubles and a home run in his past six games.

Wednesday seemed like a logical night to get Jackson out of the lineup since he is 3 for 14 with three singles and eight strikeouts against left-hander Scott Kazmir, who is starting for the Oakland Athletics. J.D. Martinez, who is starting in left and essentially is replacing Jackson in the lineup, is hitless in just three career at-bats vs. Kazmir.

Inside the minors: Eugenio Suarez off to hot start in Triple-A; Robbie Ray struggles in return to Toledo

May 29, 2014

By James Schmehl / MLive.com

Our weekly look at the Detroit Tigers' minor-league affiliates:

TRIPLE-A TOLEDO

Record: 24-28 (.462)

Standings: 4th (International League West)


Games behind: 6.5

Who's hot: SS Eugenio Suarez has hit .417 (10 for 24) with four doubles and two homers since being promoted to Toledo last week. Suarez, 22, fell a triple shy of the cycle in a 3-for-4, three-run, two-RBI performance Tuesday. ... RHP Jose Ortega (2-1, 3.05 ERA) retired nine straight Tuesday to convert a three-inning save. He hasn't allowed a run to score or issued a walk in his last four appearances, spanning six innings. ... 1B Mike Hessman hit a pair of home runs Monday and is now two shy of setting the all-time International League record of 259. ... OF Ezequiel Carrera has hit .368 (14 for 38) with two doubles, two triples, a home run and five stolen bases since returning from the 7-day disabled list. ... LHP Kyle Lobstein (3-5, 3.71 ERA) has allowed two or fewer runs in each of his last five starts, spanning 32 2/3 innings pitched. He owns a 34:5 strikeout-to-walk ratio during that span.

Who's not: LHP Robbie Ray (3-2, 1.98 ERA) struggled first start since being optioned back to Toledo, giving up three runs -- two earned -- on four hits and a season-high four walks in 3 1/3 innings Tuesday. He threw just 48 of his 86 pitches for strikes. ... LHP Duane Below (3-1, 4.30 ERA) has given up a combined 10 runs on 18 hits in his last two starts, spanning eight innings. ... INF Troy Hanzawa has hit .136 with six strikeouts in 22 at-bats since signing a minor league deal with the Tigers earlier this month.

Injury update: LHP Casey Crosby (7-day disabled list), RHP Eduardo Sanchez (7-day disabled list), INF Brandon Douglas (7-day disabled list), OF Daniel Fields (7-day disabled list)

Suspended: C Ronny Paulino (100 games)

Steven Moya mug  Steven Moya

DOUBLE-A ERIE

Record: 21-28 (.428)

Standings: 4th (Eastern League Western)


Games behind: 9.5

Who's hot: OF Steven Moya had six RBIs and a pair of home runs Saturday and has hit .579 (11 for 19) with 10 RBIs, two doubles and a triple in his last five games. ... INF Corey Jones has batted .324 with a double and a home run in his last 34 at-bats. ... RHP Bryan Augenstein (0-0, 7.36 ERA), who was activated from the 7-day disabled list last week, threw two shutout innings of relief Monday.

Who's not: INF Devon Travis has batted .179 (7 for 39) with one extra-base hit since returning from a right oblique strain last week. He had been sidelined since April 9. ... SS Dixon Machado has hit .148 with just four singles in eight games since being promoted from Single-A Lakeland.

Injury update: LHP Matt Crouse (7-day disabled list), INF Brandon Loy (7-day disabled list)

Activated: RHP Bryan Augenstein

Jake Thompson Mug  Jake Thompson

SINGLE-A LAKELAND

Record: 31-20 (.608)

Standings: 2nd (Florida State League North)

Games behind: 5

Who's hot: RHP Jake Thompson (4-1, 1.80 ERA) threw five innings of one-run ball last Wednesday. He has given up just one run or less in seven of his nine starts this season. ... OF Chad Wright is batting .395 (17 for 43) with five doubles and seven RBIs in his last 10 games. ... RHP Angel Nesbitt (1-0, 0.99 ERA) has converted

all nine save opportunities and hasn't allowed a run to score in his last nine appearances, spanning 10 1/3 innings.

Who's not: RHP Edgar De La Rosa (1-4, 3.32 ERA) has given up 11 runs, five earned, in two combined starts since returning from the disabled list last week. ... OF Connor Harrell has hit .214 with 16 strikeouts and just two walks in his last 42 at-bats.

Injury update: RHP Endrys Briceno (7-day disabled list), LHP Joe Rogers (7-day disabled list)

whitecaps logo.jpg West Michigan Whitecaps Courtesy Art

CLASS A WEST MICHIGAN

Record: 28-24 (.538)

Standings: 4th (Midwest League Eastern)

Games behind: 4.5

Who's hot: RHP Jonathon Crawford (2-1, 2.16 ERA), the Tigers' first-round pick in 2013, was named the Midwest League Pitcher of the Week after he established career highs for strikeouts and innings pitched when he threw seven shutout innings of three-hit ball Friday. Since allowing seven runs in his season debut, Crawford has given up one or fewer earned runs in each of his last seven starts.

Who's not: The Whitecaps have dropped five of their last seven games and now trail the division-leading South Bend Silver Hawks by 4 1/2 games. ... LHP Joe Mantiplay (2-1, 2.35 ERA), West Michigan's closer, allowed three runs in back-to-back appearances last week. Mantiplay hadn't given up a run in seven straight appearances prior to last week's implosion. ... OF Ben Verlander has hit .143 (5 for 35) with no extra-base hits in his last 10 games.

Injury update: RHP Charlie Gillies (7-day disabled list), RHP Jeff Thompson (7-day disabled list), INF Brett Harrison (7-day disabled list), OF Austin Schotts (7-day disabled list).

Tigers topped late after Anibal's terrific outing

Nathan tagged with game-ending homer after Sanchez departs in ninth

May 29, 2014

By Rick Eymer / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND -- John Jaso's single with one out in the bottom of the ninth inning became the point of contention for closer Joe Nathan. He gets Jaso and the approach against Josh Donaldson is a very different one.

Instead, Donaldson drilled a three-run home run on the first pitch to give the Oakland Athletics a stunning 3-1 victory over the Detroit Tigers on Wednesday night.

Anibal Sanchez gave the Tigers their best pitching performance of the season. He allowed three hits over 8 1/3 innings but was tagged with a no-decision when Donaldson connected on Nathan's first pitch.

"The big at-bat was Jaso," Nathan said. "I get him and it changes everything. It changes my approach to Donaldson and gives me a chance to play with him. I didn't get Jaso and that puts you in a tough spot. It forces you to go after one of their better hitters. Jaso is the one I wanted."

The Tigers have lost eight of their last 10 and haven't put together any kind of winning streak since winning six straight in Baltimore and Boston over 10 days ago.

"That was a tough spot to bring Joe in," Detroit manager Brad Ausmus said. "He had no margin for error. Sanchez pitched outstanding, but his pitch count got a little high. He said he felt good to start the ninth, and he's one of our horses and deserves the chance to finish the game."

Ausmus acknowledged that any baserunner would have ended the night for Sanchez, who threw a season-high 111 pitches.

"We were down in the bullpen rooting for him to finish nine and get it down," Nathan said. "He did an outstanding job. I just wish we could have finished it for him. What a job he did."

Torii Hunter, who had two hits in the contest, supplied the only offense for Detroit with a fourth-inning home run, his eighth of the season. He hit Scott Kazmir's 3-2 pitch over the wall in right-center field.

Kazmir (6-2) didn't make another mistake all night.

"He had all his pitches going," Tigers third baseman Nick Castellanos said. "He hit his spots and he never gave us the same look. It sucks because we really wanted to win this one for Sanchez. That was definitely the best performance of the season. He pitched perfectly. To not win it for him was unfortunate. He was effective with every one of his pitches."

Castellanos came close to grabbing Jaso's hit. The ball was tailing away from him and caught the tip of his glove.

"It was moving a little bit," Castellanos said. "It was definitely a catchable ball."

That set the stage for Donaldson, who produced his second career walk-off home run. The first came last year against the Tigers.

"He threw me a slider," Donaldson said. "Just kind of missed in the area where I could hit it. Thankfully I didn't miss it. I've had a few at bats off Joe Nathan. In that situation right there, being first and third, he's looking for a double play or a strikeout, and I was just trying to hit something in the air. I was sitting on the slider and was able to put a good swing on it."

Sanchez battled pinch-hitter Alberto Callaspo in a nine-pitch at bat before inducing him to ground out to second to open the ninth.

Coco Crisp sliced a double down the left-field line, prompting the move to Nathan.

Rajai Davis singled and doubled before leaving the game with a left shoulder contusion. Davis made a diving catch on a ball hit by Yoenis Cespedes in the second inning but continued to play until Austin Jackson replaced him in the bottom of the seventh.

"He just landed on his shoulder when he dove for the ball," Ausmus said. "We don't think it's anything long term."

Sanchez retired 14 of the final 16 batters he faced before giving way to Nathan, who gave up his first ever home run in Oakland.

"I tried to keep the ball down, nothing too crazy," Sanchez said. "I got a lot of ground balls and went deep in the game."

Nathan had allowed two earned runs in his previous $18 \frac{2}{3}$ innings, spanning 19 appearances in Oakland. It was his fourth blown save of the season.

Knebel settling in after quick trip up to Majors

May 29, 2014

By Rick Eymer / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Tigers right-hander Corey Knebel, drafted in 2013, made his Major League debut less than a week ago.

Considering he was pitching at the University of Texas at this time last year, his trip to the big leagues may seem like a blink of the eye.

Entering action Wednesday, Knebel has made two appearances for the Tigers. He gave up three runs in one inning against the Texas Rangers on Saturday, but he then followed that up with two scoreless innings against the Oakland Athletics on Monday.

Perhaps he wasn't as star-struck by his opponents the second time around.

"[Adrian] Beltre was one of the guys I faced," Knebel said. "I grew up playing video games with these guys. It's my first time, and here I am facing guys I had been playing with in video games."

Knebel, 22, barely got his feet wet with Triple-A Toledo before getting the call to help a depleted bullpen. He appeared in three games, throwing four scoreless innings, with the Mud Hens after he was promoted from Double-A Erie, where he started the season.

"I was much more relaxed this last time," Knebel said. "This time it didn't matter who was up, I was just facing a hitter."

The A's already led, 6-0, when Knebel entered the game. His approach was as if the game were tied.

"Every run counts," he said. "I went in there trying to put up zeroes so we'd have a chance to come back. I went in to see if I could throw strikes and blank everything else out."

Hunter keeps coming through with clutch homers

OAKLAND -- Torii Hunter did more than just get Tuesday night starter Max Scherzer off the hook for a loss -- he helped lift the Tigers to a badly needed win when he hit a solo home run in the seventh to tie the game.

That's nothing new for Hunter, who has hit a game-tying or go-ahead home run in the seventh inning or later 23 times in his career.

"I love pressure situations," he said. "I always want to be at the plate in the ninth inning, two strikes. Even if I fail, at least I had the chance."

Jackson gets night off, hopes to warm up in May

OAKLAND -- Tigers manager Brad Ausmus said outfielder Austin Jackson was just getting a game off Wednesday. After batting .310 in April, Jackson has had a rough go during May, entering Wednesday night batting .217 in the month.

"I just think April was a better month offensively," Ausmus said. "I don't think May is indicative of the type of player he's going to be over the six-month season."

Jackson, who drove in the winning run Tuesday night, has hit consistently well throughout the season, with a high of .297 in June and a low of .266 in September and October.

"There's really nothing gross that he's doing," said Ausmus. "He's just in a little bit of a funk. I don't think he's expanding the zone."

Jackson has pretty good numbers for May in his career, with the 28 doubles his best of any month and being successful in all 15 of his stolen-base attempts in the month.

Davis' delayed steal catches everyone by surprise

OAKLAND -- Rajai Davis' delayed steal in the eighth inning was a result of a perfect situation.

"It wasn't a lob. It was kind of a perfect storm," Tigers manager Brad Ausmus said. "The pitch was close. The pitcher was a little, I don't want to say upset, but he kind of wished he had gotten the call. So he was a little bit mad about that, put his head down.

"The crowd didn't react real loud. It wasn't like there was a big roar that would make him look up," Ausmus said. "So it ended up being kind of a perfect story. I think the entire stadium put their head down collectively after the pitch was called. Except for Raj, and then he took off."

Davis said he'd likely put the move on the backburner for a year or so.

"One upside is we're on the West Coast so a lot of people slept through it and didn't see it," Ausmus said.

"Everyone was asleep. Half the country was asleep. They didn't see it."

Tigers, A's both win replay challenges

May 29, 2014

By Rick Eymer / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Tigers manager Brad Ausmus successfully challenged an out call by first-base umpire Paul Emmel in the top of the second inning of Wednesday's game against the Oakland Athletics.

J.D. Martinez was originally ruled out on the back end of a double play that would have ended the inning. After a replay of a minute and 49 seconds, the call was overturned as it was determined that Martinez was safe, and the inning continued with Alex Avila grounding out to second base.

The A's were on the winning end of a replay challenge themselves in the top of the ninth inning after Miguel Cabrera was ruled safe at second in his attempt to stretch a hit into a double. A's manager Bob Melvin challenged the call, and replay review overturned the call, ruling Cabrera out to end the inning.

A's aim to hold on to series advantage vs. Tigers **Chavez takes hill in finale for Oakland against Detroit's Porcello**

May 29, 2014

By Aaron Leibowitz / MLB.com

Jesse Chavez and Rick Porcello both appear to be in the midst of breakout seasons. But both right-handers believe they can do better. They'll get their shot on Thursday when the A's and Tigers square off in the finale of a four-game series, in which Oakland holds a 2-1 series edge.

Chavez, who had started just two games in his career coming into 2014, is putting together a stellar first two months. In 10 starts, he is 4-2 with a 2.62 ERA, good for seventh among American League starters.

The 30-year-old Chavez has allowed just two runs in each of his last three starts, but he's lasted no more than 5 1/3 innings in his two most recent outings. The one-time reliever will look to go deeper into Thursday afternoon's game against Detroit.

"The last two starts, they've just been fouling off pitches and I haven't been making good 0-2 pitches, which has prolonged the at-bats, and that kind of hurts the pitch count a little bit," Chavez said. "So I think that's just the big key for me, don't prolong an at-bat. Get three pitches or less, or pick the time to choose to nibble. But other than that, just three pitches or less to each hitter, and try to outlast the other starter. That's my only goal."

Porcello also has plenty to think about following his worst start of the season against the Rangers on Saturday. Returning from left side soreness that caused the Tigers to push him back two days, Porcello surrendered 12 hits and eight earned runs over 5 1/3 innings.

While there were no clear signs of the injury bothering him, Porcello's ERA ballooned from 2.91 to 3.88 as he fell to 7-2. His seven wins are tied for third in the Majors.

"I think last start I just left too much stuff over the plate and didn't pitch ahead and just didn't have them on their heels enough," Porcello said Wednesday. "Tomorrow, being able to execute pitches and hit spots and change it up is something that's going to be key."

Porcello is 2-5 with a 4.50 ERA in eight career starts against Oakland.

A's: Bullpen still searching for rhythm

The A's bullpen, touted as one of the team's biggest strengths when the season began, is off to a peculiar start in 2014. On the one hand, A's relievers rank second in the AL in bullpen ERA (2.88). But those same relievers are responsible for 10 of Oakland's 21 losses.

"We haven't been as good as we've expected to be [in the bullpen]," manager Bob Melvin said Wednesday, a day after his 'pen allowed two late-inning runs that led to a 6-5 loss. "Again, the overall numbers don't look bad. The timeliness of it hasn't been great for us, but we'll get it ironed out."

Jim Johnson, who the A's signed for \$10 million in the offseason to be their closer, was removed from the closer role just one week into the season. After employing a closer-by-committee system for a while, Melvin named left-hander Sean Doolittle his closer last week.

Doolittle has converted four of his five save opportunities this season, but he hasn't had many chances lately with the A's struggling. Melvin is still searching for the right bullpen formula.

"We have quality guys down there," he said. "It's my job to figure out who and when, and we're all accountable for some of the nicks that we've gotten late in games here. So we'll continue to work on that and try to find the best mix of guys depending on availability on a particular day."

Tigers: Jackson struggling after hot start

Manager Brad Ausmus gave slumping center fielder Austin Jackson most of the day off on Wednesday, leaving him out of the starting lineup before putting him in as a late-game defensive replacement.

After an excellent April in which he posted a .307/.391/.520 slash line, Jackson has hit just .217/.260/.315 in May.

But Ausmus sees no reason to panic. He suggested Jackson's numbers will likely even out as the season goes along.

"There's nothing really gross that he's doing," Ausmus said. "He's just in a little bit of a funk. ... I don't think May is indicative of the type of player he's going to be over the six-month season."

Jackson has just two hits in his last 14 at-bats but is expected to be back in the starting lineup on Thursday.

Worth noting

Brandon Moss has 18 extra-base hits in May, matching the Oakland record for extra-base hits in May set in 2001 by Jason Giambi.

Donaldson's 3-run HR in 9th lifts A's over Tigers

May 29, 2014

By Dave Hogg / FOXSportsDetroit.com

Josh Donaldson hits a game-ending, three-run homer off Joe Nathan with one out in the ninth inning.

Anibal Sanchez did everything the Detroit Tigers could have possibly asked on Saturday night.

He just didn't get any help.

Sanchez took a shutout into the ninth inning against Oakland, and Brad Ausmus gave him a chance to post Detroit's first complete game of the season. The leash was short, with the Tigers only leading 1-0, and it got a lot shorter when Sanchez needed nine pitches to retire the first batter of the inning.

Coco Crisp, who always seems to come up with a big hit against the Tigers, followed with a double down the left-field line, and Ausmus didn't hesitate. He was immediately out of the dugout, signaling for Joe Nathan.

"Sanchie said he felt good, and he was only at 100 pitches, so he had some room to work with," Ausmus said.

"The first at-bat was a long one, though, and that got his pitch count up. That hurt his chances, and once Crisp got the double, it was time to get him out."

Suarez could soon be playing in Detroit

Eugenio Suarez got a close look during spring training after Tigers shortstop Jose Iglesias was ruled out for at least half of this season with fractured shins.

That's when everything fell apart. Nathan threw a 2-2 slider to John Jaso, who hit a soft liner toward left field.

Nick Castellanos got his glove on it, but couldn't make the catch, and the ball squirted into shallow left as Crisp cruised into third.

The play was scored as a hit for Jaso, but everyone agreed Castellanos should have made the catch, including the rookie himself.

"It was moving a little, but that's a catchable ball," he said. "It was going away from me, but I should have caught it. It just went off the tip of my glove."

Even if Castellanos had caught the ball, it would have been nearly impossible for him to turn a game-ending double play. Crisp is a smart baserunner, and was already moving back to second, while Castellanos would have been in an awkward throwing position.

So, instead of Oakland having a runner on second with two out, Nathan was now facing Josh Donaldson with the tying run on third, the winning run on first and only one out. That's certainly a tougher situation, but it is precisely the reason that the Tigers invested so much money in Nathan during the offseason -- to finish off close games.

It didn't happen. Nathan's next pitch was a hanging slider that Donaldson crushed down the left-field line for a game-ending three-run homer. Instead of a 1-0 victory and a two-game winning streak, the Tigers had suddenly lost for the eighth time in 10 games, and wasted a superb pitching performance in the process.

Sanchez, though, wasn't about to second-guess his manager.

"I felt good, but whatever decision he makes is good with me," he said. "It didn't become a bad decision because we lost the game. That was just one bad pitch. It happens."

A frustrated Nathan didn't exactly throw himself on his sword after the game, choosing to focus on the play Castellanos didn't make instead of his own mistake.

"The big out there was Jaso, because you get him and it changes everything," he said. "When we didn't get Jaso, it puts you in a tough spot -- first and third with a real good hitter at the plate, and it kind of forces me to go after one of their better hitters."

"So Jaso was the out we thought we had, and unfortunately, it didn't happen."

Mathematically, the Tigers were still favored to win the game after Jaso's single -- a 54.5 percent likelihood of victory, according to Fangraphs.com.

After Nathan's next pitch, the chance was zero.

Regner: Staying with Worth-Romine combo at shortstop will doom Tigers

May 29, 2014

By Art Regner / FOXSportsDetroit.com

Danny Worth (.189) and Andrew Romine (.200) have two of the lowest batting averages on the Tigers. Although the Tigers have played Houston Astros baseball over the past week, nobody should be pressing the panic button just yet.

Yes, it's been a horror show and extremely difficult to watch as every facet of Detroit's game has been in a collective slump.

But Tigers fans can take solace in the fact that the AL Central is terrible and making the playoffs again seems inevitable. Even after dropping seven of nine, they still lead the division by five games.

Suarez could soon be in Detroit

If Eugenio Suarez keeps hitting like he has during his first week at Triple-A Toledo, it might not be long before he's the starting shortstop in Detroit.

It's also nearly a given that their starting rotation will rebound from its current slump, which can cover up for some of their other weaknesses: shaky bullpen and outfield defense, lack of a left-handed power bat, and a starting catcher (Alex Avila) who doesn't consistently hit.

For the Tigers to achieve their ultimate goal of winning their first World Series since 1984, however, they DO need to upgrade one position: shortstop.

Andrew Romine and Danny Worth are utility players who can contribute in a pinch and spell guys when they need a break, but they're not everyday players. They have two of the lowest batting averages on the Tigers -- Romine (.200) and Worth (.189) -- and their defense has been shaky, especially recently.

As hard as they're trying, nether is the answer.

Within the next few weeks, the Tigers will receive an update on starting shortstop Jose Iglesias, who's out indefinitely with stress fractures in both of his shins. There's some hope that Iglesias could return after the All-Star break.

If, on the other hand, he's shut down for the season, then GM Dave Dombrowski must do something.

The shortstop position has to be filled by an exceptional player. He needs to be a difference-maker -- a glue guy who holds the team together and makes all the plays look spectacularly ordinary.

Like Dombrowski was a year ago -- when Jhonny Peralta was lost for 50 games after testing positive for PEDs and Iglesias came to Detroit at the trade deadline -- he might again be forced to shop for a major-league shortstop to get through the season.

Or maybe not.

Dombrowski could stay in house and hand over the job to his top infield prospect, Eugenio Suarez, who was promoted from Double-A Erie to Triple-A Toledo last week.

Suarez is an impressive hitter who has some pop in his bat and is an above-average fielder, which gives him more dimensions than Romine and Worth.

On Monday, Dombrowski and former Tigers skipper Jim Leyland were in Toledo to watch Suarez, and the 22-year old put on quite a display. Hitting third for the Mud Hens, the native of Edo Bolivar, Venezuela, was 3 for 4, including a mammoth first-inning home run.

In his six games as a Mud Hen, Suarez is hitting .417, with two home runs and five RBIs, and six of his 10 hits have been for extra bases.

He's committed two errors, but his upside far outweighs his deficiencies. Suarez is aggressive at the plate and has great range at short, although he's not a speed demon.

He just might turn out to be the guy to replace Iglesias, for at least the remainder of the season.

If Suarez fades, though, Dombrowski must look elsewhere.

Most of Detroit's current issues will work themselves out, but the shortstop position can't be left alone.

Having the right guy there will determine whether the Tigers simply make the playoffs or finally win it all.

Suarez could soon be playing in Detroit

May 29, 2014

By Steve Kornacki / FOXSportsDetroit.com

TOLEDO, Ohio -- How long will it take Eugenio Suarez to reach Detroit and get a shot at being the Tigers' starting shortstop?

If he keeps hitting like he has during his first week at Triple-A Toledo, it might not be long at all.

Proving he can hit at the highest minor-league level is the final test for the slick-fielding Suarez, who's considered the top defensive shortstop in the organization. He's batting .417 after going 3 for 4 with a homer that traveled well over 400 feet in Tuesday night's win over the Durham Bulls.

Tigers end skid

It was Brad Ausmus' brand of baseball that got the Tigers a key victory Tuesday night in Oakland.

"Every day, I play hungry," said Suarez, who batted third in the order Tuesday. "I want quick to play in the big leagues. I don't want to play here for long. Every day, I am hungry."

He also made a spectacular play in the sixth inning, going deep into the hole to field the ball and then firing to first to get Wilson Betemit. Suarez threw all the way across the diamond on a line without bothering to land and set his feet.

"The kid's been highly thought of, and a game like tonight shows you why," Toledo manager Larry Parrish said. Suarez's homer to left cleared Fifth Third Field and landed on Monroe Street. Suarez, who was a triple shy of hitting for the cycle, credited offseason weight lifting with his increased power.

Tigers shortstops Andrew Romine (.200) and Danny Worth (.189) are providing little offensively, and Romine has struggled some in the field recently. So calling up Suarez is extremely tempting.

Tigers general manager Dave Dombrowski and former manager Jim Leyland, now a talent evaluator, watched Tuesday's game together. They came to scout all of the Mud Hens and had a lengthy pregame discussion with Parrish. Suarez, no doubt, was a topic of conversation.

"He's done very well this year," Dombrowski said of Suarez. "But he's only been here a short while. We thought he was ready to do something. He played well at Double-A, and we were ready to move him up."

Suarez batted .284 with a hefty .503 slugging percentage in 155 at-bats with Erie. He had nine doubles, one triple and six homers with 26 RBIs before leaving the SeaWolves.

"This gives me an opportunity," said Suarez, 22. "It's very good for me. I think of me playing in the big leagues. I don't know when, but this is good for my career."

Suarez got a close look during spring training after Tigers shortstop Jose Iglesias was ruled out for at least half of this season with fractured shins. But it was determined Suarez wasn't quite ready to make the jump to the majors at that time.

Now he's giving Detroit every reason to believe he's worth a shot in the near future.

Suarez works dutifully before games with Tigers minor-league infield coordinator Kevin Bradshaw to maintain defensive consistency.

Getting instruction from Tigers infield coach Omar Vizquel during spring training was a thrill for Suarez, who hails from Venezuela along with Vizquel.

"(Omar) knows he is my special player, my favorite player," Suarez said with a smile. "He had me working every day on my defense, on making the routine plays.

"He told me, 'You've got good defense, good hands. Keep working every day ... you've got a chance to play in the big leagues.'"

Making highlight-reel plays has never been the problem for Suarez, but the routine plays have been.

"It's about not losing the concentration," said Parrish, who added that the key to Suarez's power is his quick, short stroke and ability to meet the ball with authority.

"I throw to him," Parrish said. "And he has this finish where it's all of a sudden -- pow! It helps to be strong, but that is the late snap that good hitters have and other hitters want. Bat speed -- I don't think you can teach it."

Tigers second baseman Ian Kinsler also saw something special during spring training.

Said Suarez: "(Kinsler) said, 'You've got good, quick hands. You've got a chance to play in the big leagues.

You've got a chance to play as a combination with me in the big leagues.'"

A notice was posted in the Mud Hens clubhouse Tuesday that the team photo will be taken Sunday. With the way Suarez is playing, though, it's even money that he won't be around for it.

The kid is obsessed with making his dream come true as soon as possible.

HANRAHAN THROWING IN LAKELAND

Joel Hanrahan, the former All-Star closer who had Tommy John surgery last May, is throwing bullpen sessions in Lakeland, Fla.

Dombrowski said that will be the likely spot for the beginning of Hanrahan's rehabilitation assignment, but he doesn't appear close to that. Hanrahan has yet to face batters.

"We're not rushing him, but he's making progress," Dombrowski said. "It's not like he's a day away from going into a game."

Hanrahan will give the Tigers another proven, veteran reliever to go with Joba Chamberlain and Joe Nathan.

Learning to walk just part of growing pains for Tigers rookie Nick Castellanos

May 29, 2014

By Matthew Mowery / The Oakland Press

DETROIT >> You have to walk before you can run. That's true in every segment of life.

And, while it looked all along like Nick Castellanos was doing a good job of hitting the ground running as a rookie, he wasn't really doing a great job of — well, walking.

At least not until recently.

After walking just four times in his first 151 plate appearances this season — including a span of a month with zero walks and 28 strikeouts — Castellanos has drawn six walks in his last 13 plate appearances, including a critical one as a pinch hitter late in Tuesday's win.

"I don't know that he's doing anything differently. Walks come in bunches, it seems like," manager Brad Ausmus said.

"It was kind of funny: He asked me the other day if I thought he had a better chance of hitting four home runs or getting four walks that day. It was kind of a toss-up, really. It's just ironic that he has walked a little bit here (recently). He's still giving good at-bats. He's learning, so there's going to be a curve to that."

It may seem like an inconsequential thing, when compared to some of the other counting stats — home runs, doubles, RBI — that he has provided. But it's a key indicator of the maturation process.

Probably bigger than where he'll end up finishing in the Rookie of the Year balloting, especially given the stacked field this season.

"He's been fine. I don't think anybody thought he was going to come up and be Mike Trout. He's gotta learn the league, and the league's going to learn him," Ausmus said.

"He's going to make adjustments, they're going to adjust to him. It's growing pains. For a young player, they go through growing pains. ... It's just part of being a young player. And the truth is, we don't really know what type of a player he is."

The book on Castellanos is starting to fill in, though.

He's proven to be a better-than-adequate defender at third base, thanks to lots of hard work with coaches Omar Vizquel and Matt Martin. The charging, bare-handed play — with Phil Coke right in his shirt — to get Michael Bourn in Cleveland last week might have been his masterpiece play.

He's flashed some power, when he's connected with pitches, but he's also shown some issues with pitch (and spin) recognition. There are also a few pitches in certain locations that have given him trouble, like the slider down and away.

"Teams are going to see that on video, and start to attack that. We've talked about him having to make adjustments," Ausmus said. "He's going to have to make an adjustment, get that pitch up, or lay off it, or a combination of the two."

This is the season where that big-league learning curve kicks in. Thanks to his September call-up, most of that learning is strictly on-field stuff.

He's answered all the questions right, kept all of the right mindsets, too, throughout that sometimes-painful learning process.

A lot of that is because he's very, very well grounded.

"You have to be (at ease) in this game. ... Always, growing up, I've been a very at-ease, laid-back player. Now, in the big leagues, you'll have to remind yourself, 'Take a step back and relax.' Because it can all get pretty fast. Giving interviews ... playing in front of 50,000 people, plane rides, and everything. Life can speed up pretty quick, so you have to remind yourself to slow down, Castellanos said.

"I think a big help with that is me being a dad now. I realize what's really important. At the end of the day, this is just a baseball game. No matter what I do tomorrow, when I go home and hold my kid, and watch him play and stuff, I'm going to have a great day."

Josh Donaldson rallies A's to 3-1 win over Tigers

May 29, 2014

By The Associated Press Staff / The Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — After being shut down by Anibal Sanchez all night, the Oakland Athletics were happy finally to get a chance at Detroit's bullpen in the ninth.

Josh Donaldson hit a game-ending three-run homer off Joe Nathan with one out in the ninth and Scott Kazmir pitched his first complete game in nearly eight years to help the A's rally for a 3-1 victory over the Detroit Tigers on Wednesday night.

"It's always a bit of a relief," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "But it's not like Nathan is a day at the beach either. But certainly when a guy has had your number for that long for that period of time, you feel like now here is a new breath of life for us."

BOX SCORE: Athletics 3, Tigers 1

Sanchez was in command all night, allowing only two hits as he took a shutout bid into the ninth inning before Oakland rallied to hand the Tigers their eighth loss in 10 games.

Coco Crisp got it started with one out when he hit an opposite-field double just inside the third-base line that ended Sanchez's night after 111 pitches.

John Jaso greeted Nathan with a single off third baseman Nick Castellanos' glove to set the stage for Donaldson. "The big out there was getting Jaso," Nathan said. "You get him and it changes everything. It changes how you approach Donaldson. It changes how you pitch to him. It gives me a chance to play with him a little bit. When we didn't get Jaso, it put us in a tough spot."

Donaldson made the most of his opportunity, hitting a towering drive down the left-field line that he stood and watched, hoping it would stay fair. It did as he ended up with his second career walk-off homer, having also hit one April 12, 2013, against the Tigers.

"They had about three balls tonight that went down that line and they kind of kept hooking foul," Donaldson said. "I saw where mine started. I was just praying that it would stay fair."

It did and Nathan (2-1) blew his fourth save in 16 chances.

"It was a tough spot to bring Joe into, with the tying run on second base," manager Brad Ausmus said. "He has no margin for error. It was tough spot."

Kazmir (6-2) allowed six hits and no walks with eight strikeouts, giving up only a solo homer to Torii Hunter in the fourth inning in his second career complete game.

"As a fan that was a fun game to watch right there. It was," Kazmir said. "Throughout the whole game Anibal and I were just battling it out, out for out. We ended up getting a couple of baserunners up in the ninth and Donaldson comes up. You just kind of had that feeling when he came up to be honest with you. He saw that first pitch and didn't miss it. It was awesome."

Sanchez faced the minimum through three innings with center fielder Rajai Davis making a diving catch in the gap to rob Yoenis Cespedes of extra bases in the second inning and the Tigers turning a well-executed 3-6-1 inning-ending double play after Josh Reddick walked in the third for Oakland's first baserunner.

The A's got their first hit the following inning when Donaldson hit a clean single to center. Sanchez was helped again by his defense after that with first baseman Miguel Cabrera snaring a liner by Brandon Moss to end the inning and preserve the 1-0 lead.

The Tigers had gone ahead in the top half of the inning when Hunter hit a drive over the fence in right-center for his eighth homer of the season. Hunter hit a game-tying solo shot in Detroit's 6-5 win Tuesday night.

NOTES: Kazmir's only other complete game came in a 3-0 win over Boston on July 3, 2006. ... Donaldson has reached base safely in 46 of his past 47 games. ... Davis left in the seventh inning with a bruised left shoulder and is day to day. ... Jesse Chavez (4-1) will start the series finale on Thursday for Oakland against Rick Porcello (7-1).

Ejections up in MLB: Detroit Tigers' Torii Hunter says, 'We really want to give it to them' on balls, strikes

May 29, 2014

By Jorge Ortiz / USAToday.com

OAKLAND, CALIF. — The one universal truth regarding baseball's implementation of expanded video replay this year was that arguments and ejections would diminish. After all, what's the sense in arguing incontrovertible visual evidence?

Well, so far, that assumption has been overturned.

Going into Tuesday's games, ejections of players, managers and coaches in the majors had totaled 61, 22% more than the 50 ejections through May of last season, according to retrosheet.org. And the No. 1 reason was as clear as that call that the umpires botched to cost your favorite team a win.

Ball-strike calls, which are not reviewable, were by far the top bone of contention, leading to nearly half (30) of the 61 ejections. Last year at this point, that figure was 16, with another 12 getting tossed for disputing calls on the bases.

Those are mostly a thing of the past now, so players have focused their frustration with umpires on how they call pitches.

"That's when we really want to give it to them, because we can't argue anything else," Detroit Tigers outfielder Torii Hunter said. "The game is trying to be so perfect that when you look at the balls and strikes, you're hoping they would be perfect, and they're not. Anything with a man in it is not perfect, but the machine can make something perfect. And when the umpires don't have that machine behind them calling balls and strikes for them, there's going to be mistakes made.

"So of course we're going to argue more, because we can't argue anything else."

As expected, the expansion of video reviews has added to the length of games, which now take an average of about three minutes longer to play, from 2:58:51 for all of last season to 3:02:14 through Sunday's games.

That's up 10 minutes from 2010, and not entirely because of video reviews, which have been averaging 2 minutes, 9 seconds from the moment the manager steps on the field until a ruling is made.

If this year's pace of ejections continues, it would produce a full-season total of 195, a good bit over last year's total of 180, which came in an environment of limited instant replay.

Those figures initially came as a big surprise to St. Louis Cardinals manager Mike Matheny (Michigan), who has gotten the heave-ho twice this season. Upon some reflection, though, Matheny agreed with Hunter's conclusion that the wrath of players and managers simply has gotten redirected.

And perhaps, theorized Oakland catcher John Jaso, umpires don't care for the ball-strike badgering when technology already is keeping a watchful eye on their work.

"Maybe umpires are quicker to pull the trigger on an ejection because they are getting put under the microscope a little bit more," says Jaso. "That would be the only (explanation) I could think of."

The ball-strike count has always been one of the game's most critical elements, with a borderline call in any number of counts dramatically shifting the advantage in an at-bat between pitcher and hitter, depending on which way it goes.

In 2013, major leaguers batted .351 in a 2-1 count, and .166 in a 1-2 count.

"There's a lot more being targeted toward the guy behind the plate," Matheny said. "Both times on me, it's been strike-zone oriented.

"And you've almost taken some of the passion out of the game from that perspective, to where before we had an opportunity to run out on the field and defend our players."

Tigers rookie manager Brad Ausmus was attempting to do just that when he got tossed for the first time as a skipper last Wednesday against the Cleveland Indians.

After Ian Kinsler got called out for not checking his swing on a disputed third strike, Miguel Cabrera argued with plate umpire Tim Timmons over his own attempt to check his swing. Timmons threw out Cabrera, and when Ausmus argued, he got the same treatment.

However, Ausmus said he has noticed a significant difference in some umpires' attitudes from when the season started.

"In the very early stages of replay this season, I felt like some umpires didn't want to be overturned, like that was an insult to their ability to umpire," Ausmus said. "I think that's changed. I think they've become comfortable with the fact replay is part of the game, and the goal's to get the call right.

"And the truth is with a lot of these plays, if you have to slow down an HD camera to super-slow motion to see if the guy is safe or out, it's understandable that umpires with the naked eye are not getting the calls right all the time."

Apparently, that sense of understanding stops when it comes to ball-strike calls.

Last updated: Thu, May 29, 2014, 07:21 EDT

Thursday, May 29, 2014

Team	Player	Transaction
New York Mets	Travis d'Arnaud	Removed from 7-Day DL, (Concussion)
New York Mets	Travis d'Arnaud	Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment

Wednesday, May 28, 2014

Team	Player	Transaction
Arizona Diamondbacks	Alfredo Marte	Sent to Minors
Arizona Diamondbacks	Nick Evans	Purchased From Minors
Atlanta Braves	Tommy La Stella	Purchased From Minors
Atlanta Braves	Tyler Pastornicky	Sent to Minors
Baltimore Orioles	Evan Meek	Outrighted to Minors
Boston Red Sox	Clay Buchholz	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Hyperextended left knee)
Boston Red Sox	Alex Wilson	Called Up from Minors
Cleveland Indians	Jason Kipnis	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Strained right oblique)
Cleveland Indians	Justin Sellers	Sent to Minors
Cleveland Indians	Jason Kipnis	Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment
Los Angeles Angels	Matt Shoemaker	Called Up from Minors
Los Angeles Angels	Sean Burnett	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Torn left UCL - out for season)
Los Angeles Dodgers	Carl Crawford	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Sprained left ankle)
Los Angeles Dodgers	Johnny Monell	Traded From from Orioles, Baltimore (for future considerations)
Los Angeles Dodgers	Jamie Romak	Purchased From Minors
New York Mets	Juan Centeno	Sent to Minors
Seattle Mariners	Xavier Nady	Signed to a Minor League Contract
Tampa Bay Rays	Ryan Hanigan	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Strained right hamstring)
Tampa Bay Rays	Kevin Kiermaier	Called Up from Minors
Tampa Bay Rays	Ben Zobrist	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation
Texas Rangers	Joe Saunders	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Bruised left ankle)
Texas Rangers	Phil Irwin	Acquired Off Waivers From from Pirates, Pittsburgh
Texas Rangers	Phil Irwin	Sent to Minors
Texas Rangers	Joe Saunders	Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment
Texas Rangers	Aaron Poreda	Sent to Minors

Tuesday, May 27, 2014

Team	Player	Transaction
Baltimore Orioles	Chris Davis	Reinstated from Paternity Leave List
Baltimore Orioles	Steve Clevenger	Sent to Minors
Chicago Cubs	Wesley Wright	Placed on Paternity Leave List
Chicago Cubs	Blake Parker	Called Up from Minors
Cincinnati Reds	Carlos Marmol	Signed to a Minor League Contract

Cleveland Indians	Carlos Santana	Placed on 7-Day DL, (Concussion-like symptoms)
Cleveland Indians	Nick Swisher	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Hyperextended left knee)
Cleveland Indians	Blake Wood	Designated for Assignment
Cleveland Indians	George Kottaras	Purchased From Minors
Cleveland Indians	Jesus Aguilar	Called Up from Minors
Houston Astros	Chia-Jen Lo	Released
Kansas City Royals	Max Ramirez	Signed to a Minor League Contract
Miami Marlins	Carter Capps	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Right elbow sprain)
Miami Marlins	Arquimedes Caminero	Called Up from Minors
New York Mets	Vic Black	Called Up from Minors
San Diego Padres	Blaine Boyer	Outrighted to Minors
San Diego Padres	Billy Buckner	Outrighted to Minors
Tampa Bay Rays	Matt Moore	Transferred to 60-Day DL, (Left elbow surgery - out for season)
Tampa Bay Rays	Ali Solis	Purchased From Minors
Toronto Blue Jays	Mike Zagurski	Signed to a Minor League Contract
Washington Nationals	Ross Ohlendorf	Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment

Monday, May 26, 2014

Team	Player	Transaction
Atlanta Braves	Kameron Loe	Signed to a Minor League Contract
Boston Red Sox	Steven Wright	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation
Boston Red Sox	Ryan Lavarney	Called Up from Minors
Chicago Cubs	Justin Ruggiano	Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment
Chicago Cubs	Justin Ruggiano	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Strained left hamstring)
Chicago Cubs	Ryan Kalish	Sent to Minors
Houston Astros	Robbie Grossman	Called Up from Minors
Kansas City Royals	Casey Coleman	Sent to Minors
Kansas City Royals	Omar Infante	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Disc irritation, lower back)
Kansas City Royals	Omar Infante	Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment
Los Angeles Dodgers	A.J. Ellis	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Right ankle sprain)
Los Angeles Dodgers	Tim Federowicz	Called Up from Minors
Milwaukee Brewers	Irving Falu	Purchased From Minors
Milwaukee Brewers	Jim Henderson	Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment
Minnesota Twins	Oswaldo Arcia	Called Up from Minors
Minnesota Twins	Josh Willingham	Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment
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	Jose Valverde	Released
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	Called Up from Minors
Tampa Bay Rays	Alex Colome	Sent to 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
Arizona Diamondbacks	Zeke Spruill	Return of 26th man
Arizona Diamondbacks	Zeke Spruill	Called Up from Minors, (recalled as 26th roster player)
Baltimore Orioles	Chris Davis	Placed on Paternity Leave List
Baltimore Orioles	Steve Lombardozzi	Sent to Minors
Baltimore Orioles	Preston Guilmet	Called Up from Minors
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
Houston Astros	L.J. Hoes	Sent to Minors
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	Wade LeBlanc	Purchased From Minors
Los Angeles Angels	Matt Shoemaker	Sent to Minors
Los Angeles Dodgers	Chris Withrow	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Undisclosed injury)
Milwaukee Brewers	Jimmy Nelson	Sent to Minors
Milwaukee Brewers	Jimmy Nelson	Called Up from Minors
Minnesota Twins	Chris Colabello	Sent to Minors
Minnesota Twins	Chris Herrmann	Sent to Minors
New York Mets	Vic Black	Return of 26th man
New York Mets	Vic Black	Called Up from Minors, (recalled as 26th roster player)
New York Mets	Travis d'Arnaud	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation
Philadelphia Phillies	Cody Asche	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Strained left hamstring)
Philadelphia Phillies	Justin De Fratus	Called Up from Minors
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
St. Louis Cardinals	Joey Butler	Cleared Waivers and Became a Free Agent
St. Louis Cardinals	Joey Butler	Signed to Play in Japan, (Orix Buffaloes)
Toronto Blue Jays	Hector Gimenez	Traded From from White Sox, Chi. White Sox (for cash

Team	Player	Transaction
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
Baltimore Orioles	Nick Hundley	Traded From from Padres, San Diego (with cash for LHP Troy Patton)
Baltimore Orioles	Steve Lombardozzi	Called Up from Minors
Boston Red Sox	Daniel Nava	Called Up from Minors
Boston Red Sox	Shane Victorino	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Strained right hamstring)
Chicago White Sox	Frank Francisco	Outrighted to Minors
Cleveland Indians	Mike Zagurski	Released
Colorado Rockies	Josh Rutledge	Called Up from Minors
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	Miguel Olivo	Cleared Waivers and Became a Free Agent
Los Angeles Dodgers	Jhan Marinez	Signed to a Minor League Contract
Miami Marlins	Brad Hand	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Sprained right ankle)
Miami Marlins	Dan Jennings	Called Up from Minors
Milwaukee Brewers	Jeff Bianchi	Outrighted to Minors
Philadelphia Phillies	David Buchanan	Purchased From Minors
Philadelphia Phillies	Luis Garcia	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Strained right forearm)
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	Stephen Drew	Sent to Minors
Boston Red Sox	Alex Wilson	Called Up from Minors
Chicago White Sox	Jeff Keppinger	Cleared Waivers and Became a Free Agent
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	Sent to Minors
Houston Astros	Rudy Owens	Called Up from Minors
Kansas City Royals	Omar Infante	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation
Kansas City Royals	Jimmy Paredes	Called Up from Minors
Kansas City Royals	Justin Maxwell	Outrighted to Minors
Los Angeles Angels	Sean Burnett	Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment
Los Angeles Angels	Sean Burnett	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Recovery from left elbow surgery)
Los Angeles Angels	Efren Navarro	Sent to Minors
Milwaukee Brewers	Jim Henderson	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation
Pittsburgh Pirates	Jason Grilli	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Left oblique strain)
Pittsburgh Pirates	Russell Martin	Reinstated From League Suspension
Pittsburgh Pirates	Tony Sanchez	Sent to Minors
Pittsburgh Pirates	Josh Wall	Sent to Minors
Seattle Mariners	Logan Morrison	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation
St. Louis Cardinals	Joey Butler	Released
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)
Texas Rangers	Donnie Murphy	Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment
Toronto Blue Jays	Liam Hendriks	Called Up from Minors
Toronto Blue Jays	Esmil Rogers	Designated for Assignment