

ASTROS DAILY CLIPS

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Sloppy first inning sends Astros to third straight loss to Rangers

By: Jose de Jesus Ortiz / Houston Chronicle

ARLINGTON — Considering the disappointing first two games of the series, the Astros had reason to believe their fortunes would turn with Scott Kazmir on the mound Wednesday night against the Rangers.

The reigning American League Pitcher of the Month had not lost since June 27. By the time the first inning was over, however, Kazmir had given up more runs at Globe Life Park than he allowed in the entire month of July.

With the help of consecutive errors by Kazmir and Hank Conger to start the game, the Rangers scored three unearned runs in the first inning and then held on for a 4-3 victory to complete the sweep before a crowd of 31,782.

The Astros' lead atop the American League West fell to two games ahead of the Angels. The third-place Rangers, who are 8-4 in the Lone Star Series this year, moved within five games of first.

"It all started with me. I didn't set the tone well," Kazmir said after he gave up six hits and four runs, one earned, with two walks and five strikeouts in 5²/₃ innings. "An easy play right in front of me. I just rushed it. I didn't get in front of the ball, and it cost us.

"A couple of errors like that early on and to give a team like that momentum it's tough."

Nick Martinez (7-6) gave up one run on one hit and three walks with one strikeout in five innings for the victory. Sam Dyson struck out Carlos Gomez and induced Carlos Correa's fielder's choice groundout to earn the save by stranding two in the ninth.

The Astros will now face the A's in a four-game series on their second stop of a three-city, nine-game trip through Arlington, Oakland and San Francisco.

Kazmir had thrown 142³/₃ scoreless inning over his first two starts for the Astros since he was acquired from the A's on July 23. Delino DeShields led off with a bunt to the right side. Kazmir lost the grip of the ball for an error.

"I should have used my judgment a little bit better," Kazmir said. "I felt like I had a little more time. Even with the bobble it was close enough. I just should have taken my time and made sure I had a good grip of the ball and made a solid throw, but it didn't happen."

Ryan Strausborger followed with another bunt in front of the plate. Conger fielded the bunt and sent an errant throw past Jose Altuve, who was trying to cover first. DeShields reached third on that error.

Prince Fielder followed with a sacrifice fly to left field. After Adrian Beltre walked, Mitch Moreland gave the Rangers a 2-0 lead with a single to center. Elvis Andrus added another RBI single to center to take a 3-0 lead over Kazmir, who gave up only two runs (one earned) in 34 innings in July.

"They had two singles, three runs, two errors, a walk," manager A.J. Hinch said of the first inning. "We just didn't get into the game. We had opportunities in the sixth and ninth.

"We obviously need to get out of town and get to a new series. We didn't play very well this series. They did."

Chris Gimenez led off the second with a shot to center to give the Rangers a 4-0 lead. Gomez drew a leadoff walk and stole second in the fourth. Jed Lowrie cut the deficit to 4-1 with a one-out, RBI double to center.

Correa drew a one-out walk off reliever Phil Klein in the sixth. He stole second and then stole third as Lowrie walked. Evan Gattis cut the Rangers' lead to 4-2 with an RBI single to right.

Sam Freeman took over and loaded the bases with a five-pitch walk to Colby Rasmus. Conger drew another five-pitch walk to plate a run, cutting the Rangers' lead to 4-3.

Freeman struck out Luis Valbuena and then turned it over to righthander Spencer Patton. Jake Marisnick flied out to shallow center field, stranding the bases loaded.

Rasmus kept the Astros' hopes alive in the eighth when he hit a two-out single to right off Jake Diekman. He reached second on a wild pitch, but Conger flied out to right to end the inning.

Marwin Gonzalez greeted Dyson with a pinch single to right in the ninth. He moved to second on Jason Castro's pinch dribbler in front of the plate. Dyson then clipped Altuve in the top of his left elbow pad, putting two on for Gomez.

"Really it was one of those ballgames we were sitting over there looking for somebody to hit the ball at somebody," Rangers manager Jeff Banister said. "It happened and we come away with a sweep and a W. It's all few good."

The Astros didn't feel quite as good.

Astros remain confident in Dan Straily despite recent designation for assignment

By: Jose de Jesus Ortiz / Houston Chronicle

ARLINGTON – Manager A.J. Hinch was adamant that the Astros' decision to designate Dan Straily on Wednesday was more procedural than an indication of what the club thinks of the righthander.

The Astros designated Straily for assignment Wednesday to recall Asher Wojciechowski from Class AAA Fresno.

Barring a claim by another team, Straily will be optioned to Class AAA Fresno on Thursday.

"The DFA part of it is a procedural move that has to do with option waivers," Hinch said. "It's really procedural. ... It looks weird because of the designated for assignment, which often times means you're on your way out of the organization. But that's not the case here."

Straily (0-1, 5.87 ERA) was designated a day after he gave up six hits and four runs with three walks and three strikeouts in 42/3 innings in a 4-3 loss to the Rangers on Tuesday.

"We haven't had a situation like this, this year," Astros general manager Jeff Luhnow said. "The fact that we used two of our starters in one day and we were dealing with a six-man (rotation) and a short 'pen, it's important that we add somebody in the bullpen that is a long man. We don't want to be in a situation like we were in Monday."

Astros pitcher Asher Wojciechowski 'appreciative to get back' to major leagues

By: Jose de Jesus Ortiz / Houston Chronicle

ARLINGTON — Rookie righthander Asher Wojciechowski, who earned a spot in the Astros' opening day rotation in spring training, is eager to make the most out of his fourth stint with the big league club this season.

Wojciechowski will serve as the Astros' long reliever.

"It's a great opportunity," he said. "I'm very appreciative to get back out here. I want to make the best of it and help the team."

Wojciechowski earned the promotion from Class AAA Fresno in part because he was scheduled to start for the Grizzlies on Wednesday. He is 0-1 with a 7.31 ERA over four games (three starts) in the majors this season and 6-2 with a 5.42 ERA in 15 starts at Fresno.

"We needed an extra arm," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "We've been carrying one less reliever, really two less relievers than we've been accustomed throughout the year.

"Then one less with the six starters that have been around. Wojo is fresh. It's his day to pitch in Triple-A, so we wanted to get him up here and have an option in case we need him."

Wojciechowski started two games and made one relief appearance during his first two stints in the majors this year, but he was unused when he was up for the third time on May 8-10.

"I'll try to help this team whichever way I can," he said.

Lefthander Joe Thatcher back with Astros on a minor league deal

By: Jose de Jesus Ortiz / Houston Chronicle

ARLINGTON — Lefthanded reliever Joe Thatcher, who tested the free-agent market after rejecting an assignment to Class AAA Fresno, re-signed with the Astros on a minor-league contract Wednesday.

The Astros designated Thatcher for assignment on July 21. He opted for free agency and initially refused an assignment to Fresno, but he has returned to the organization.

He was 1-3 with a 3.79 ERA over 19 innings in 36 relief appearances.

Thatcher, 33, and Tony Sipp had been the Astros' primary lefthanded relievers most of the year.

A.J. Hinch on struggling Chris Carter: 'We're going to need him down the stretch'

By: Jose de Jesus Ortiz / Houston Chronicle

ARLINGTON — Astros manager A.J. Hinch on Wednesday afternoon took time out to meet with slugger Chris Carter, whose playing time has decreased dramatically recently.

Luis Valbuena started at first base Wednesday for the second time in the three-game series. Carter leads the Astros with 84 starts at first base, but he hasn't started at first since Saturday.

"I wanted to encourage Carter to know that he started predominantly all of the games the first two-thirds of the season," Hinch said. "We're going to need him down the stretch and we're going to need him to be productive."

"Obviously his opportunities have thinned out a little bit over the last week or so. He'll be back in there and he'll provide some power for us when we need it."

Hinch got a pinch hit at-bat Tuesday in his first game action since he was the Astros' designated hitter Sunday. He was on an 0-for-10 skid heading into Wednesday.

"It's tough," Carter said. "You want to be out there and just play every day and help the team. But this situation when you haven't really been hitting well it's kind of a tough spot to be in."

Carter, who is hitting .181 with 17 home runs and 47 RBIs this season, has started only five games at first base since July 12.

"I met with Carter today and continued to try to support him and get him ready for either a pinch hit opportunity or potentially starting sometime in the Oakland series," Hinch said. "We've got guys that are playing well. We've seen Valbuena swing the bat pretty well the last few days."

"I wanted (Jed) Lowrie back in the lineup today, so that lends itself to Valbuena heading over to first. You're always on board with these guys wanting to push and get the most out of them."

Astros hold rookie Preston Tucker out of lineup for series finale against Rangers

By: Jose de Jesus Ortiz / Houston Chronicle

ARLINGTON — Preston Tucker was out of the starting lineup Wednesday for the series finale against the Rangers a night after he exited with a right triceps contusion.

"Between today and yesterday the mobility has gotten a lot better and the swelling has got down a lot," he said. "Hopefully (Thursday) it will be good enough to play and I'll go out and play."

Tucker suffered the injury when Rangers righthander Yovani Gallardo hit him with a pitch in the second inning Tuesday. He exited in the eighth inning because he was unable to bend his elbow.

"He'll be fine," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "It's just a matter of getting some of the soreness out. He'll probably be back in there in Oakland. He's available tonight. I could have started him, but I wanted to get Jake (Marisnick) in there. With (Scott) Kazmir pitching (and) a lot of fly balls to the outfield our best outfield defense is probably the best way to go."

Kazmir's first Astros loss a matter of tough luck

By: Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

ARLINGTON -- The first two batters to face Scott Kazmir on Wednesday night reached on errors after hitting the ball maybe a combined 15 feet. Then there was a sacrifice fly, a walk and a couple of soft liners that landed in the outfield for RBI singles.

It was that kind of night for Kazmir and the Astros, who were swept by the Rangers on their second consecutive 4-3 loss at Globe Life Park. Kazmir (6-6), making his third start with Houston, didn't pitch poorly, giving up one earned run in 5 2/3 innings while taking the loss.

"I think the whole game starts in the first inning," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "They had two singles, three runs, two errors, a walk. We just didn't get into the game."

Rangers leadoff hitter Delino DeShields began the rally with a dribbler in front of the plate that Kazmir dropped as he tried to pick it up. Ryan Strausborger followed with a bunt that catcher Hank Conger threw away, putting runners at first and third with no outs.

That set up the Rangers nicely. Prince Fielder had a sac fly and Mitch Moreland and Elvis Andrus had RBI singles to give Texas a 3-0 lead.

"It was tough," said Kazmir, who threw 25 pitches in the first inning on a night when it was 100 degrees at first pitch. "It all started with me. I didn't set the tone well. Easy play right in front of me and just rushed it and didn't get in front of the ball. It cost us. A couple of errors like that early on and you give a team like that momentum, and it's tough."

Conger said he didn't do Kazmir any favors by throwing the ball away.

"It's just one of those innings on back-to-back bunts and things got out of hand a little bit," he said. "After that I thought he did a great job coming back and giving us a good chance to win later in the game."

Kazmir, who didn't allow a run over 14 2/3 innings in his first two starts after coming over in a trade with Oakland, did surrender his first earned run with the Astros when Chris Gimenez homered to lead off the second for a 4-0 lead.

"He hit it well," Kazmir said. "I just thought it was too high. I thought it was going to stay in the park."

Still, Kazmir has allowed three or fewer earned runs in 20 of 21 starts and has allowed one earned run or fewer in six consecutive starts.

DYK: Facts, stats from Correa's 1st 50 career games

Houston shortstop hits milestone Wednesday night vs. Rangers

By: Paul Casella / MLB.com

Carlos Correa has only been in the Majors for slightly less than two months, but the Astros phenom has wasted no time making his mark on the league.

The 20-year-old shortstop played in his 50th game on Wednesday night -- and, against the Rangers, put his all-around talent on full display. Along with swiping a couple of bases en route to scoring a run, the former No. 1 overall pick added to his already-lengthy highlight reel with an incredible stop-and-jump throw to end the fifth inning.

Ranked as the No. 2 overall prospect by MLB.com at the time of his June 8 debut, Correa has had little trouble living up to, if not exceeding, the lofty expectations that accompanied his promotion. Here's a look at a dozen of his most impressive accomplishments over his first 50 career ballgames:

- Correa's 13 homers are four more than any other shortstop has ever hit in his first 50 games. The previous record belonged to Nomar Garciaparra, who hit nine homers over his first 50 games with the Red Sox in 1996.

- The 13 home runs are also the fifth-most by any active player in his first 50 games, regardless of position. The only current players to hit more homers over their first 50 games are Jose Abreu (17), Albert Pujols (16), Ryan Braun (15) and Evan Gattis(14).
- Correa has homered in 12 of his first 50 games, including one multi-homer effort, making him the first Astros player ever to homer in at least a dozen of his first 50 games. The second-highest total belongs to teammate George Springer, who homered in 11 of his first 50 games last year. Prior to Correa and Springer, no Astros player had homered in even 10 of his first 50 career contests.
- Correa already has six games in which he has racked up at least three hits and a home run. The only player since at least 1914 with more such efforts within the first 50 games of his career is, notably, also an Astro -- Hunter Pence, who had seven such outings back in 2007.
- Correa also joined Pence, as well as Eric Anthony (1990), as the only three players in franchise history with multiple games of at least one stolen base and one home run within his first 50. Correa is also just the third shortstop to ever accomplish that same feat, joining Garciaparra and Bert Campaneris.
- Correa has seven three-hit games overall, tied for the most ever by a shortstop through his first 50 games. Four other shortstops - Garry Templeton, Lonny Frey, Clint Barmes and Mike Aviles -- also racked up seven three-hit efforts in that same span.
- Moving on to some of Correa's other tools, the all-around talent stole two more bases on Wednesday night to bring his 50-game total to eight. That makes him the first player with at least 13 homers and eight stolen bases in his first 50 games since Braun hit 15 home runs and swiped eight bases over his first 50 games in 2007.
- Three of those stolen bases came in just his 10th big league game back on June 18 against the Rockies. In swiping three bases in a single game, Correa became just the third American League player in the last 100 years to do so within his first 10 career ballgames. The only other AL players to accomplish that same feat were Alex Cole (1990 Indians) and Julio Borbon, who did it twice within his first 10 games for the 2009 Rangers. Correa was just the ninth player to do so overall and the first since Billy Hamilton in 2013.
- As if that weren't impressive enough, Correa also scored two runs in that June 18 game, making him the only shortstop in Major League history to steal three bases and score at least two runs in the same game within his first 50 contests.
- The Astros phenom has also turned in eight games in which he compiled at least two hits and two RBIs. Among active players, only Pujols, David Ortiz and Braun had more two-hit, two-RBI efforts within their first 50 games.
- Correa picked up at least one hit in 37 of his first 50 games, tied for the fifth-most in franchise history. Outfielder Gerald Young holds the club record by collecting at least one hit in 40 of his first 50 big league games back in 1987.
- Those 37 games with at least one hit are also tied for the sixth-most by any shortstop within his first 50 games. Red Kress and Harvey Kuenn hold the all-time record, with each picking up a hit in 40 of their first 50 games. Both players did so over parts of two seasons; Kress completed the feat from 1926-27 and Kuenn did it from '52-53.

Kazmir burnt by sloppy first inning vs. Rangers

By: Brian McTaggart and T.R. Sullivan / MLB.com

ARLINGTON -- The Rangers built a four-run lead after two innings against Astros starter Scott Kazmir and held on for a 4-3 victory on Wednesday night at Globe Life Park. The win, Texas' seventh in its last eight games, secured a Lone Star Series sweep.

Rangers starter Nick Martinez, pitching on his 25th birthday, earned the win, allowing one run in five innings. He allowed just one hit, an RBI double by Jed Lowrie in the fourth, and walked three.

"I felt great," Martinez said. "We had a good game plan and we executed it. I got my pitch count up, but we were able to bring in reinforcements and get a big win."

The Rangers scored three runs in the first, all unearned thanks to errors by Kazmir and catcher Hank Conger. The first-place Astros now lead the Angels by two games and the Rangers by five in the American League West.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Texas 'pen hangs on: The Rangers' bullpen, leading 4-1, almost cratered in the sixth inning. With one out, right-hander Phil Klein gave up two walks and an RBI single to Evan Gattis. Sam Freeman took over and walked the next two hitters, forcing in another run. But Freeman struck out Luis Valbuena and Spencer Pattonretired Jake Marisnick on a fly to center to escape with a 4-3 lead.

"We were just sitting in the dugout hoping we could get something hit right at somebody," Rangers manager Jeff Banister said.

Clutch it eludes Astros: The Astros, who have lost 11 of 12 on the road, were 2-for-11 with runners in scoring position. They drew a season-high eight walks and had a batter reach on a hit by pitch, but the clutch hits eluded them once again.

"I'm proud of our guys," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "We fought; we battled; we played hard; the effort's there. Even at the end and putting up a fight in the sixth inning and ninth innings. We didn't score enough runs."

Strausborger hits ground bunting: Outfielder Ryan Strausborger made his Major League debut, batting in the No. 2 spot, and had a big part in the Rangers' three-run first inning. After Delino DeShields reached on an error by Kazmir, Strausborger dropped a sacrifice bunt and was safe when Conger threw wildly to first base. That set the table for RBIs from Prince Fielder, Mitch Moreland and Elvis Andrus.

"I think the whole game starts in the first inning," Hinch said. "They had two singles, three runs, two errors, a walk. We just didn't get into the game."

Kazmir finally blinks: In his first two starts with the Astros, Kazmir pitched 14 2/3 scoreless innings and allowed only six hits. After giving up three unearned runs in the first inning in this one, Kazmir allowed a leadoff homer to Chris Gimenez in the second -- the only earned run he gave up in 5 2/3 innings.

QUOTABLE

"Gutsy baseball. It wasn't pretty. You don't typically win when you walk eight and hit one." -- Banister

"We obviously need to get out of town, get to a new series. We didn't play very well this series; they did. We need to get on with the schedule and wipe this one out of our memory quickly because we could play better." -- Hinch

WHAT'S NEXT

Astros: Scott Feldman (4-5, 4.58 ERA) makes his fourth start since coming off disabled list following knee surgery when the Astros open a four-game series against the A's at 9:05 p.m. CT Thursday in Oakland. The Astros are 5-8 in his 13 starts, eight of which have been quality.

Rangers: The Rangers are off on Thursday before opening a three-game series against the Mariners at 9:10 p.m. CT on Friday at Safeco Field. Cole Hamels (6-7, 3.76), making his second start since being acquired from the Phillies, will try to end Texas' five-game losing streak against Seattle.

Astros hope to end road woes vs. A's

By: Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

The Astros, having lost 11 of their last 12 road games, will try to turn around their misfortune Thursday night in Oakland against the A's. They'll send veteran right-hander Scott Feldman to the mound against rookie right-hander Aaron Brooks, who will make his second start of the season and third of his career.

Feldman has made three starts since coming off disabled list following knee surgery and is 0-1 with a 3.86 ERA (one quality start). The Astros are 5-8 in his starts, eight of which have been quality.

Brooks, acquired in the July 28 trade that sent Ben Zobrist to the Royals, picked up his first Major League win on Saturday by allowing one run on five hits in 7 1/3 innings against Cleveland.

Things to know:

- The A's have lost nine of their last 13 games and are 7-11 since the All-Star break. At 48-61, they have the worst record in the AL.
- The Astros have eight players with at least 10 home runs, one shy of the franchise record set in 2000. Jose Altuve (nine) and Hank Conger (eight) are closing in.

- Oakland has hit .178 through the first seven games of its 11-game homestand. While going 3-4, they've averaged 2.7 runs per game, with only two homers.

Wojciechowski gives Astros a fresh arm

By: Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

ARLINGTON -- With their bullpen having pitched 11 innings in the first two games of the series against the Rangers, the Astros were forced to call in a reinforcement and summoned right-hander Asher Wojciechowski from Triple-A Fresno. He had been scheduled to start for the Grizzlies on Wednesday.

To make room for Wojciechowski prior to Wednesday's Lone Star Series finale, right-hander Dan Straily was designated for assignment, though the Astros will keep him in the organization. Wojciechowski, who will be used in long relief, was on the Astros' Opening Day roster and is in his fourth stint with the club this year.

Wojciechowski, 26, is rated by MLB.com as the Astros' No. 22 prospect. He was 6-2 with a 5.42 ERA in 15 starts for the Grizzlies this year.

"I thought I was competing well," he said. "I was coming off a couple of rough outings where things didn't really go my way, but stuff-wise I felt good. I felt like I was really working on my pitches and getting better. I felt like just these last couple of games down there for me I didn't perform as well, but I felt good with my stuff. I was happy to get the call and I'm looking forward to playing up here and helping these guys win."

The Astros have carried eight relief pitchers for most of the season, but they recently went to seven when they decided to carry six starting pitchers. After Lance McCullers couldn't pitch out of the first inning Monday, Mike Fiers -- Tuesday's scheduled starter -- threw five innings in relief.

"We needed an extra arm," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "It's his day to pitch in Triple-A and we wanted to get him up here and have an option in case we need him. We've beat up our bullpen a little bit the last week or so, mostly good situations, but they've all thrown a lot. We're not going to use Straily in the rotation moving forward."

Designating Straily for assignment was a procedural move involving option waivers.

"We may see him back up in September when rosters expand, or if we need him between now and then, obviously he's an option," Hinch said.

Worth noting

- Outfielder Preston Tucker, who left Tuesday's game with a bruised triceps after getting hit by a pitch, was held out of the starting lineup Wednesday but was available, Hinch said.

"Between today and yesterday, the mobility has gotten a lot better and swelling's gone down a lot, so hopefully tomorrow it will be good enough where I can go out and play," Tucker said.

- The Astros have brought back left-hander Joe Thatcher on a Minor League contract. He will report to Triple-A Fresno this weekend. Thatcher began the 2015 season with the Astros before being designated for assignment on July 21. Thatcher became a free agent after rejecting his outright assignment to the Minors.

Astros lead, but AL West race far from over

By: Doug Miller / MLB.com

The Astros are no longer baseball's pleasant, plucky surprise of 2015, and the Angels and Rangers know it all too well. So does the rest of baseball, in fact. Houston's ownership of the top spot in the American League West now and for much of this season proves it. So does the team's aggressive maneuvering at the non-waiver Trade Deadline.

But the Angels and Rangers are not giving up and have the talent to make noise down the stretch. Seattle and Oakland have the horses to possibly get into the Wild Card picture with torrid play late in the year. Wilder things have happened, and the 2015 AL West has been all kinds of wild.

As of now, however, it's likely that the division crown will go to the Astros or the Angels. Houston seems to have the advantage, with a three-game lead over Los Angeles entering Wednesday and the July trade haul of starters Scott Kazmir and Mike Fiers and outfielder Carlos Gomez for the stretch drive. The Angels are in the mix for the West and for a Wild Card, but they need to get healthy -- literally and figuratively.

What changed at the Trade Deadline?

The Astros opted to get more seasoning and experience to augment a young and talented core. Enter Kazmir and Fiers, who fit the Houston mold of power arms, and Gomez, who is an offensive catalyst when right. The Astros are now loaded with a multidimensional and versatile roster built to compete in October.

The Angels needed an upgrade in the outfield and will try to get it from any of the three players they acquired at the Deadline: David Murphy, Shane Victorino and David DeJesus. The possible season-ending injury to starter C.J. Wilson is a blow, but the looming return of Jered Weaver could be a big help.

The Rangers, meanwhile, made the biggest deal of the bunch, landing ace Cole Hamels from the Phillies for a package of prospects in hopes of competing next year and beyond if they don't make up enough ground late this summer. Seattle and Oakland went into sell mode, with the A's trading Ben Zobrist and Kazmir and the Mariners saying goodbye to J.A. Happ, Dustin Ackley and Mark Lowe.

Who might still make a move?

The Mariners and A's got into a bit of dealing, signaling that they might be looking to 2016 and beyond, so don't be surprised if they look to trade away more of their movable pieces. Given the Wilson situation, it would not be a shocker to see the Angels try to add more pitching.

Player to watch

Who else? It's gotta be Mike Trout. The consensus best player in the sport, well into another MVP-caliber year, will be called upon more than ever to help spark his team to a second consecutive October appearance. The Angels have struggled recently and have health concerns, so they'll need Trout's wizardry to show up almost on a nightly basis.

Wild Card

Houston has the upper hand in the division, the bold Deadline moves and the emergence of rookie shortstop Carlos Correa, who has been a staple of the lineup since his callup. That said, the Angels have talent and the veteran leadership and experience the Astros lack, which makes this race far from a runaway. Texas isn't out of it, either. A spark from Hamels and continued resurgence from Adrian Beltre and Rougned Odor could help the Rangers rally to a Wild Card berth or better.

Series to watch

Astros @ Angels, Sept. 11-13

Astros @ Rangers, Sept. 14-17

Angels @ Astros, Sept. 21-23

Where does it go from here?

The Astros' longest road trip for the rest of the season, a 10-game journey in mid-September, could tell the tale for how the West is won. Houston must finish that jaunt with seven games against the Angels and Rangers.

Rangers win 4-3 to complete sweep of AL West-leading Astros

By: Associated Press / espn.com

ARLINGTON, Texas -- All that really matters for manager Jeff Banister and the Texas Rangers is getting the victory that finished off a three-game sweep of the AL West-leading Houston Astros.

"It wasn't pretty, typically you don't win a ballgame when you walk eight and hit one," Banister said. "That's a first for me ... a low-scoring, one-run game and win that game."

Chris Gimenez hit what proved to be a deciding home run and Texas held on for the 4-3 win Wednesday night, using five relievers after Nick Martinez allowed one hit and one run over five innings on his 25th birthday.

The homer by Gimenez leading off the second for a 4-0 lead was the only extra-base hit for the Rangers, and came after they scored three unearned runs in the first off Scott Kazmir (6-6).

The Rangers have won four in a row and seven of eight, moving within five games of the division lead, the closest they have been since June 30.

"It was a big series for us," Banister said.

All three Houston runs were scored by players who reached on a walk.

With 20-save closer Shawn Tolleson unavailable after pitching six of the previous seven games, Sam Dyson got his second career save -- both since a Friday trade from Miami. He closed it out only after allowing a leadoff single in the ninth and hitting Jose Altuve with a pitch.

"I think everybody's doing their jobs," shortstop Elvis Andrus said.

Martinez (7-6), walked three and struck out one while throwing 86 pitches in a game which start with the temperature at 100 degrees.

"It wasn't a clean outing for him," Banister said. "Essentially, he battled himself all night long trying to get the ball in the strike zone."

Kazmir, in his third start for Houston since a July 23 trade from Oakland, lowered his AL-best ERA from 2.10 to 2.08 since only one run against him was earned. The right-hander struck out five in his 5 2/3 innings.

He had thrown 14 2/3 scoreless innings in his first two starts for Houston, part of his five games in July while allowing one earned run over 34 innings (0.26 ERA). Earlier this season for the A's, Kazmir gave up only three runs over 21 innings in three starts against the Rangers.

Delino DeShields reached to start the Texas first when Kazmir was unable to cleanly field the roller in front of the plate for an error. Ryan Strausborger, in his first major league at-bat, had a sacrifice bunt but reached on catcher Hank Conger's throwing error. Prince Fielder had a sacrifice fly before consecutive RBI singles by Mitch Moreland and Elvis Andrus.

"It all started with me. It did. I didn't set the tone well. It was an easy play right in front of me and I just rushed it," Kazmir said. "A couple errors early on against a team like that gave `em momentum. It's tough."

Houston was within 4-3 after five consecutive batters reached with one out in the sixth against two relievers.

Carlos Correa and Jed Lowrie drew consecutive walks before Evan Gattis' RBI single. Sam Freeman, after replacing Phil Klein, walked the first two batters he faced, including Conger with the bases loaded.

Carlos Gomez had a leadoff walk in the fourth and scored on a double by Lowrie.

"That's a tough day," manager A.J. Hinch said. "Eight walks and a hit-by-pitch; we just didn't score enough runs."

SURGING AT HOME

The seven wins in the last eight for the Rangers have all come at home, after they lost 12 of the previous 13 there.

DEFENSIVE GEMS

There were a lot of defensive highlights. In the Texas fifth when Astros CF Gomez had a long running catch in the gap, 2B Altuve made a diving play to his left and 20-year-old SS Correa went into the hole toward third base and then made a long jump-step throw for an out. An inning earlier, Texas SS Elvis Andrus made a similar play and rookie RF Strausborger had an inning-ending diving catch.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Astros: OF Preston Tucker is day to day with a bruised triceps muscle after getting hit by a pitch in Tuesday night's game.

Rangers: LHP Derek Holland, out since a shoulder strain in the April 10 home opener, says he "feels very good" after 55 pitches in his latest rehab start Tuesday night. He's expected to next start Sunday for Double-A Frisco.

UP NEXT

Astros: Scott Feldman (4-5) starts Thursday when Houston starts a four-game series at Oakland, the second of three consecutive road series.

Rangers: After a day off Thursday, the Rangers open a weekend series Friday at Seattle with LHP Cole Hamels making his second start for Texas since his trade from Philadelphia.

Fresno Grizzlies win fifth straight

Pitching continues to dominate as Grizzlies move to 5-0 on the homestand

By: Fresno Grizzlies

FRESNO, Calif. - The comforts of home continue to bring riches for the first-place Fresno Grizzlies (64-47) as they defeated the Sacramento River Cats (52-60) on Wednesday night by a score of 5-2 at Chukchansi Park. Left-hander Luis Cruz turned in a solid outing, filling in for scheduled starter Asher Wojciechowski, who was called up to the Astros this morning. Cruz worked around five walks and a dangerous second inning to limit the River Cats to a run over four innings. Jake Buchanan followed him up with a strong three-inning effort to pick up the win, while Kevin Chapman and Jason Stoffel both threw scoreless innings to close it out.

Although it was early in the game, Cruz yanked the Grizzlies away from a large deficit in the second by limiting the River Cats to a single run despite having a four batter sequence that went hit by pitch, walk, walk, walk. With one out and the bases still loaded, Skyler Stromsmoe fouled off two pitches deep into the left field seats, but eventually popped out in foul territory to third baseman Matt Duffy. Everth Cabrera then followed up by bouncing out to first base to end the inning.

Only down 1-0, Fresno jumped on Sacramento starter Nik Turley for three runs in the bottom of the third to capture the lead. Matt Duffy scored L.J. Hoes with a single to right-center, while Robbie Grossman ripped a go-ahead two-run single two batters later to put the Grizzlies ahead 3-1.

Fresno added two key insurance runs in the sixth thanks to an error by shortstop Everth Cabrera on a Tony Kemp grounder that would've made for the second out of the inning. Max Stassi took advantage by plating Kemp on a triple into the gap in right-center and scored a batter later on Nolan Fontana's deep sacrifice fly to right.

Sacramento's Darren Ford led off the next inning with an inside-the-park home run (8), but the River Cats couldn't inch any closer despite having two runners on in both the eighth and ninth innings.

The Grizzlies are now 8-4 against Sacramento this season and will aim for a season-high sixth straight win on Thursday night at Chukchansi Park. To coincide with the Taco Truck Throwdown 5 promotion, the Grizzlies will take the field as the Fresno Tacos. The Tacos will be led by starter Mark Appel, who seeks to build off of his impressive 10 strikeout performance against Albuquerque earlier this homestand. Gates for Thursday night's game open at 5:05 PM. The only tickets remaining are Standing Room Only and can be purchased for \$25 at the Chukchansi Park Box Office beginning at 9 AM.

Fresno Tacos merchandise will be on sale in the Grizzlies Team Store beginning at 5:05 PM to only those holding an August 6th game ticket. For those not attending the game, the Tacos merchandise will be available in store beginning on Friday, August 7th at Noon.

Hooks Sweep Missions

Club now 6-3 in extra innings

By: Corpus Christi Hooks

SAN ANTONIO - Danry Vasquez drove in the go-ahead run in the 11th and Teoscar Hernandez added a home run and two RBIs to lead the Hooks to a 6-3 extra inning win and a sweep of the Missions at Wolf Stadium Wednesday night before 5,581.

Cody Hebner (0-1) started the 11th inning on the mound for San Antonio and allowed back-to-back singles to Jon Kemmer and Jio Mier to begin the frame. Conrad Gregor bunted into a fielder's choice, and after Alfredo Gonzalez walked to load the bases, Vasquez singled to center to give the Hooks (23-17, 71-39) a 4-3 lead.

Hernandez continued the inning with a base hit to plate Gregor, spelling the end of the night for Hebner. Brandon Alger trotted in from the bullpen and fanned Colin Moran for the second out, but walked A.J. Reed to force in a run and give the Hooks their final, three-run margin.

The game began as a pitchers' duel, after the Missions (16-24, 47-63) struck out of the gate against Corpus Christi starter Joe Musgrove. Tyson Gillies notched a two-out, two-run single in the bottom of the first. It marked San Antonio's first lead of the series.

In the Corpus Christi fifth, Jon Kemmer led off with a double and scored on Roberto Pena's RBI single to make it a one-run game, but San Antonio got the run back when Alberth Martinez led off the bottom of the sixth with his sixth home run of the season.

It was the only earned run Musgrove allowed on the night. His final line: 7 IP, 6 H, 3 R, 1 ER, 0 BB, and 5 SO.

Missions starting pitcher Bryan Rodriguez continued to hold the Hooks in check through seven innings, scattering one walk and six hits with eight strikeouts. He gave way to Eury De La Rosa to begin the eighth. De La Rosa walked Danry Vasquez to start the inning, then Teoscar Hernandez went deep to tie the game at three. It was Hernandez's 14th home run of the season, five of which have come against San Antonio.

Vince Velasquez (4-0), added to the Hooks on Sunday from Houston, pitched three shutout innings of relief to earn the win, while Jandel Gustave (13) nailed down the save with a hitless 11th inning.

The Hooks return to Whataburger Field Thursday to take on the Midland RockHounds at 7:05 with Kyle Westwood (7-4, 4.39) on the mound. It's a Stripes Thirsty Thursday and the first 2,000 fans through the gates will receive a Hooks DRI-FIT Neon Aqua Lettered T-Shirt, presented by CPL Retail Energy.

Blaze ride seven-run fourth to take series

Paulino struggles, takes loss in second outing for JetHawks

By: Spenser Smith / Lancaster JetHawks

LANCASTER, Calif. - After holding two leads in the early innings, the JetHawks could not recover from a seven-run Bakersfield Blaze rally in the fourth and eventually fell, 12-5, on Wednesday night at The Hangar.

In an abbreviated outing, JetHawks (54-55) starter David Paulino (0-1) yielded eight runs over just 3.2 innings on seven hits and three walks while striking out three. Paulino, Michael Freeman, Jordan Mills and Tyler Brunnemann issued a combined eight walks in the game.

A fifth-inning solo home run off Brett Ash gave J.D. Davis a homer in his second straight game and his 18th of the season. Lancaster totaled 14 hits but left 13 men on base as Bakersfield claimed the series victory.

With the JetHawks holding a 3-2 lead, the Blaze (41-68) rallied for seven runs against Paulino in the fourth. After a single and two walks, Nelson Ward gave Bakersfield the lead with a two-out, three-run triple. Tyler O'Neill was hit by a pitch, and Austin Wilson delivered a two-run triple to chase Paulino from the game. Freeman took over in relief and promptly gave up a two-run homer to Kyle Petty, extending the Blaze's lead to 9-3.

After Mills held Bakersfield scoreless in the sixth and seventh, the Blaze would add three more runs in the eighth on doubles by Wilson and Rayder Ascanio. Brunnemann entered from the bullpen and retired three straight batters to escape the inning, and the right-hander would also hold Bakersfield scoreless in the ninth.

The Blaze had scored first on a RBI-groundout by Ascanio in the top of the second, but the JetHawks took the lead in the bottom half on a two-run single by James Ramsay. A Nelson Ward RBI-single tied the game in the third before Lancaster moved back in front on a RBI-double by Marc Wik in the home half.

Rafael Pineda (3-2) received the win in relief for Bakersfield, allowing just one hit over 3.1 scoreless innings.

The homestand continues on Thursday as the JetHawks open a four-game series against the High Desert Mavericks, with first pitch scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Kevin Comer (1-4, 5.44) will start for Lancaster against the Mavericks' David Ledbetter (1-8, 8.39). In continuation of the Superstar Series presented by the University of Antelope Valley, the JetHawks will welcome the Famous Chicken to The Hangar.

Seven-run second fuels Bandits' 9th straight win

Garrett Stubbs has a career-high three hits with two RBI doubles, and Dean Deetz earns first Midwest League win

By: Jess Knaster / Quad Cities River Bandits

Dean Deetz pitched five shutout innings in his first Midwest League start, allowing three hits and two walks while striking out four, and the River Bandits' seven-run rally on six hits in the second inning helped power Quad Cities to a ninth straight win with a 10-3 victory over the Bowling Green Hot Rods in front of 2,144 at Modern Woodmen Park Wednesday night.

The solid start by Deetz (1-0) extended a scoreless streak by River Bandits starting pitchers to 35 consecutive innings over the last six games. In his five innings Wednesday, Deetz retired the side in order twice, and had two strikeouts in his fifth and final inning of work.

Quad Cities (26-13 second half, 71-36 overall) erupted for seven runs in the second inning, bringing 11 men to the plate and chasing Hot Rods starter Brad Wallace (2-3) after just 1 2/3 innings. Designated hitter Drew Ferguson began the frame with a double to left, followed by a double to center by catcher Garrett Stubbs to score Ferguson and put the River Bandits on the board. Third baseman Luis Reynoso singled, moving Stubbs to third, and after shortstop Kristian Trompiz flied out to left, a double by left fielder Jason Martin scored both Stubbs and Reynoso, making it 3-0.

The rally continued with Martin stealing third base before a walk to center fielder Bobby Boyd, who was then caught stealing with second baseman Nick Tanielu at the plate. With Martin at third base, Tanielu tripled to the right-field corner and scored on an RBI single by first baseman Bryan Muñiz, who was the last batter in Wallace's day. Reliever Ryan Pennell walked right fielder Ramon Laureano on four pitches and then committed a two-base throwing error on a ground ball by Ferguson, hitting for the second time in the inning. The errant throw got past first baseman Alec Sole, allowing both Muñiz and Laureano to score, making it a 7-0 River Bandits lead.

With one out in the bottom of the fourth, Laureano was hit by a pitch, and Ferguson walked, followed by Stubbs' second RBI double, making it an 8-0 lead. Ferguson, who advanced to third on Stubbs' double, scored on Reynoso's fly ball to right, extending the lead to 9-0.

Bowling Green (19-20, 56-53) cut into the lead in the sixth inning against reliever Jorge Perez with three consecutive run-scoring plays. With runners on the corners and one out, left fielder Bralin Jackson singled home third baseman Grant Kay to put the Hot Rods on the board, ending a 15 1/3 scoreless streak to begin the series. James then grounded out, scoring designated hitter Hunter Lockwood, and a Sole double plated Jackson, making it a 9-3 game.

Six runs was the closest the Hot Rods came, as the River Bandits strung together three straight two-out singles in the sixth, culminating in a Trompiz RBI single, putting Quad Cities into double digits for the second time in its current winning streak. Every River Bandit had at least one hit, led by Stubbs' career-high three hits, including two doubles for his first two career extra-base hits.

Quad Cities left-hander Zach Davis struck out two in the seventh inning and retired all six batters he faced, and newcomer and fellow left-hander Steve Naemark worked a perfect ninth inning in his Midwest League debut.

The River Bandits wrap up their series with Bowling Green Thursday at 7 p.m., when right-hander Agapito Barrios (0-0, 0.00) faces Hot Rods righty Henry Centeno (6-6, 3.76).

UP NEXT: Gates open at 6 p.m. for Thursday's Reynolds Ford Used Car Giveaway, when fans may enter to win one of FOUR used cars to be given away free! The 7 p.m. game is a Thirst-Day with \$2 drinks presented by 104.9 The Hawk, ESPN 93.5 and River

Cities' Reader. Tickets are buy-one-get-one free at the box office for IHMVCU members. Individual tickets are on sale at the River Bandits box office and online at riverbandits.com. Ticket plans of 12 to 70 games - which include free parking, reserved seats, merchandise discounts, and guaranteed giveaways - are available by calling 563-324-3000.

ABOUT THE BANDITS: With the installation of the Ferris Wheel, the River Bandits ownership in 2014 made one of the biggest improvements to Modern Woodmen Park since the ballpark was first built back in 1931, and this year the club is matching that effort by opening three new areas. A two-tiered special group deck immediately behind and overlooking the corn field opened in June. A new 11,000-square-foot concourse expansion down the third-base line will open in July. Finally, the club is expanding the children's play area by an additional 5,500 square feet down the right-field line. New rides will be announced upon completion of these new areas.

Renegades top 'Cats 2-1 in final game of series

By: Tri-City ValleyCats

WAPPINGERS FALLS, NY - The Tri-City ValleyCats fell to the Hudson Valley Renegades 2-1 on Wednesday night, despite a solo home run by Hector Roa, while Harold Arauz, Yeyfry Del Rosario, and Junior Garcia combined to strike out 11 batters.

Tri-City scored first, when Roa led off the top of the second inning by smashing an 0-2 pitch from Renegades left-hander Travis Ott over the left field fence, for his third home run in the past five games.

Unfortunately, Hudson Valley pushed two runs across in the bottom half of the second on back-to-back sacrifice flies, to jump ahead 2-1. They then went on to hold Tri-City scoreless over the final seven innings.

Arauz got the start for the 'Cats, allowing only four hits, while striking out four batters in four innings. It was the fourth consecutive appearance that saw the right-hander register at least four strikeouts.

Del Rosario then came on to pitch the fifth inning, striking out two batters in a scoreless frame.

He then gave way to Garcia, who matched a career-high with five strikeouts, while allowing only two hits in three innings.

Despite the 2-1 defeat, Tri-City still took two out of three games in the road series against the Renegades, thanks to Monday's 6-5 win, and Tuesday's 1-0 victory. They will now head south to Maryland, to take on the Aberdeen IronBirds. On the mound for the ValleyCats on Thursday, in the first game of the three-game series, will be RHP Kevin McCanna (0-2, 3.92), with LHP Travis Seabrooke (2-4, 4.89) getting the start for Aberdeen.

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Astros beat Blue Jays in rain-shortened game

By: Nick Carey / Greeneville Astros

Bluefield, WV - The Greeneville Astros (22-19) picked up a 5-1 victory over the Bluefield Blue Jays (18-24) in a rain-shortened game on Wednesday night at Bowen Field.

All but one batter in the Astros lineup recorded at least one hit in the win at Bluefield, which lasted just five innings. The Blue Jays scored in the bottom of the first but not again as the Astros amassed five runs across the third and fourth frames.

Right-hander Albert Abreu picked up his second win of the season tossing all five innings for the Astros and allowing one hit and one run. Abreu also managed six strikeouts en route to lowering his earned run average to 2.83 on the season.

Greeneville scored four of their five runs in the top of the third inning beginning with a leadoff single by Daz Cameron who swiped his fourth stolen base of the season shortly after with Conner Goedert at the plate. Goedert proceeded to fly a ground-rule double to centerfield to score Cameron for the Astros first run.

With one out and Goedert on second, Kevin Martir and Kyle Tucker nailed back-to-back singles with Tucker's scoring Goedert to put the Astros up 2-1. Ford Stainback reached on an error as both Martir and Tucker crossed the plate to give Greeneville a 4-1 advantage. Arturo Michelena drew a walk; Osvaldo Duarte singled and stole second before the inning ended.

The fifth and final run for the Astros came in the top of the fourth as Cameron led off with a line drive double to right then moved to third on a Goedert single. Brauly Mejia followed with a third consecutive single for Astros hitters to score Cameron.

Shortly after Abreu retired the Blue Jays in the bottom of the fifth the game was called to rain and declared complete for the Astros 5-1 victory.

Cameron led the Greeneville hitters with a three-for-four performance including a double, a stolen base and two runs scored. Goedert was two-for-three at the plate with a double, run and RBI. Mejia, Duarte and Tucker were each one-for-three with Mejia notching a RBI and Tucker scoring a run and Duarte stealing a base.

Martir and Stainback both went one-for-two with Martir scoring his eighth run of the season. Designated hitter Myles Straw recorded a double for one hit in four at-bats.

The Astros will face the Blue Jays again in Bluefield on Thursday in a rubber game to conclude the series. Greeneville will return to Pioneer Park on Friday against the Bristol Pirates with a 7 PM scheduled first pitch.

Elias Says...

By: Elias Sports Bureau / espn.com

Mets score big, makes things easy for Harvey

The Mets scored four times in the third inning, stretched their lead to 7-0 in the fifth, and survived a furious ninth-inning Marlins rally for an 8-6 win at Miami. Two items of note on the Mets' four-run third inning:

It was the fourth consecutive game in which the Mets scored at least four runs in one inning, tying the longest such streak in team history.

A cushion of that size has been an automatic win with Matt Harvey on the mound. Harvey has now won all 17 games in which the Mets staked him to a lead of three or more runs. That's the longest such streak by a Mets pitcher since Tom Glavine won 20 straight (2004-06).--

Boyd impresses in his Tigers debut

Nine rookie pitchers started on Wednesday night and the most impressive performance among them might have been Matt Boyd's 2-1 victory over Johnny Cueto and the Royals. Boyd allowed seven hits without walking a batter in seven innings. It had been 86 years since a pitcher earned his first major-league win in his Tigers debut by pitching at least seven innings with no walks. The last to do so was Art Herring, who had an off-and-on major-league career of 199 appearances with a 34-38 record from 1929 to 1947.

Ortiz always delivers in the Bronx

David Ortiz homered off debutant Luis Severino in the Red Sox' 2-1 victory at Yankee Stadium. Severino was the 34th different Yankees pitcher against whom Ortiz has homered, the highest such total by any opponent in team history. Ortiz has hit at least one home run in each of his last four series at Yankee Stadium and in 10 of his last 14 series there.

Giants rookie Tomlinson matches Hornsby & Kent

Let's have some fun with this one. Kelby Tomlinson drove in three runs in the Giants' 6-1 win at Atlanta, two nights after making his major-league debut. The only other second basemen with at least three RBI in either their first or second game with the Giants were Rogers Hornsby and Jeff Kent.

Taylor Made

Taylor Jungmann improved his record to 6-3 pitching seven innings in the Brewers' 8-5 win over the Padres. It was Jungmann's sixth start at Miller Park, where he has yet to allow a home run. He is the first pitcher in Brewers history not to surrender a homer in his first six home starts.

Haren's first impression for the Cubs ... not so good

Gregory Polanco homered leading off the bottom of the first, setting the tone for the Pirates' 7-5 win over Dan Haren in his debut for the Cubs. Haren was the first pitcher since 1900 to allow a home run to the opposing team's leadoff batter in the first inning of his first game with the Cubs.

Davis continues to crush the ball

Chris Davis extended his batting surge on Wednesday, hitting a grand-slam home run in the 10th inning to give the Orioles a 7-3 win at Oakland. Davis has homered nine times and driven in 26 runs in his last 15 games. Since the St. Louis Browns moved to Baltimore in 1954, only three other Orioles players matched Davis' totals in those categories over a 15-game span: Jim Gentile (1961), Cal Ripken Jr. (1996), and Albert Belle (2000).

The key to scoring against Kazmir: errors

You just can't predict baseball. Scott Kazmir's 0.26 ERA in July was the lowest by a qualifying pitcher in one calendar month in four years—since Cliff Lee posted a 0.21 mark in June 2011. So on Wednesday, Kazmir started for Houston, the first two Texas batters reached on errors, and Kazmir allowed three unearned runs in the first inning of an eventual 4-3 loss.

Indians closer suffers loss on a wild pitch

Cody Allen allowed three runs in the bottom of the ninth, including the game-winner on a wild pitch, as the Angels rallied for a 4-3 win over the Indians. Allen entered the game tied for ninth in the American League with 22 saves. Since 2000, only two other pitchers threw a game-ending wild pitch after having saved as many as 20 games in that season: Kevin Gregg with the Marlins in 2008 and Carlos Marmol with the Cubs in 2011.

Unfortunately for the Mariners, Rodney does it again

Fernando Rodney squandered a two-run lead in the bottom of the ninth in the Mariners' 7-5 loss in 11 innings at Colorado. Rodney has blown 30 saves over the last six seasons, by far the highest total in the American League during that time. The AL runner-up since 2010 is Jim Johnson with 23.

Dodgers get some support for their big guns

Brett Anderson allowed one run in six innings to earn the victory and even his record at 6-6 as the Dodgers defeated the Phillies, 4-3. Dodgers pitchers other than Clayton Kershaw and Zack Greinke have been credited with quality starts in only 10 of their last 30 games.

8.6.15 OPPONENT AT OAKLAND ATHLETICS

A's bullpen slips up in 10-inning loss to Orioles

By: Trevor Hass and Brittany Ghiroli / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Chris Davis crushed a grand slam in the 10th inning to give the Orioles a series-clinching 7-3 win over the A's on Wednesday at the Coliseum.

"That was [a big win]," Orioles manager Buck Showalter said. "It's tough. Everybody is working on short sleep. There's a lot of opportunities there to give in, and our guys didn't. You want to start the road trip off winning a series because now we are going to a couple tough venues [in Anaheim and Seattle]."

The slam was Davis' second of the season and the sixth of his career. It came off Arnold Leon, who allowed all four runs in the 10th.

"I was trying to go away to get a ground-ball double play, but I didn't execute very well the way I wanted to," Leon said.

Kendall Graveman surrendered three earned runs on six hits in 5 2/3 innings for the A's, while Wei-Yin Chen yielded three earned runs on four hits in five innings for the O's. The teams traded scoreless innings from the seventh through ninth until Davis' mammoth shot to left-center.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Victory slam: The Orioles' first baseman hit his second grand slam in 12 days, again breaking a tie and putting Baltimore up big. Davis, who has been red hot of late, has 28 homers and 79 RBIs on the season.

"I feel like I'm seeing the ball well right now," Davis said. "Being patient for the most part ... these guys made some really good pitches throughout the series to me. Just hitting their spots. ... You try to take advantage of the situations where we have runners in scoring positions and not do too much and just get one run in. And a lot of times when you're just trying to do a little you get rewarded with a lot."

Chen's recent struggles continue: The lefty had made six consecutive quality starts but has now been unable to complete six innings in three straight outings. Chen was the O's ace the first half of the season, but struggled again on Wednesday, laboring through five innings. He gave up three runs on four hits and four walks.

"Ever since the second half started, I've felt not as good as the first half so I tried to do a couple different [mechanical] things that didn't work out," Chen said through his interpreter. "So now, I don't want to keep doing that."

Taking one away: Billy Burns robbed Adam Jones of a potential game-tying home run in the sixth inning. The O's still scored two runs in the frame to knot the score, but Burns' impressive play helped ensure the inning didn't get out of hand.

"Great catch," Graveman said. "We've seen that out of him all year and we'll continue to see that throughout his career. Every time you think maybe there's not a chance, he still gets to the baseball."

Not his day: The A's recalled Leon from Triple-A Nashville on Monday, planning to give him a longer look. He struggled mightily in his first appearance back with the club, allowing two singles, a walk and the Davis blast.

"[Beginning with] the Manny Machado [single] -- he goes the other way and they go first and third right now and we're in a bit of a tough spot," A's manager Bob Melvin said of how the inning started. "[The count] goes to 3-2. The ball was down, but Davis is a pretty good low-ball hitter, and on a 3-2 count he was looking for a fastball there."

QUOTABLE

"I made the joke -- that's about as long as I last anyway starting. So if he had me in one more inning we would have been in trouble."

-- Orioles closer Zach Britton, who pitched 2 1/3 innings, his longest relief outing since April 16, 2014, to pick up the win

UPON FURTHER REVIEW

Burns was almost caught leaning off second when Marcus Semien scored on Brett Lawrie's sacrifice fly in the third. The O's recognized there was no play at the plate, so they tried to nab Burns at second, but he was called safe and the call was confirmed after replay.

WHAT'S NEXT

Orioles: Baltimore will enjoy an off-day on Thursday before going to Anaheim for a weekend set against the Angels. Right-hander Kevin Gausman will get the start opposite lefty Andrew Heaney in the 10:05 p.m. ET. matchup on Friday.

A's: Aaron Brooks takes the mound as the A's open a four-game set with the Astros on Thursday at 7:05 PT. Brooks shined in his first start with Oakland, yielding one earned run on five hits in 7 1/3 innings in a 5-1 win over the Indians on Saturday.

Valencia eager to contribute to A's in any role

Crisp (neck stiffness), Reddick (lower back tightness) come off bench in finale

By: Trevor Hass / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Danny Valencia couldn't believe it when the Blue Jays designated him for assignment on Saturday.

"Never saw that coming," Valencia said.

But now he's in Oakland and he's eager to start a new chapter with the A's. Valencia was in the starting lineup against O's left-hander Wei-Yin Chen on Wednesday, going 1-for-5 while playing third base in the A's 7-3 loss in 10 innings.

Manager Bob Melvin said Valencia will typically be used when the opponent starts a lefty -- he entered Wednesday hitting .316 against left-handers this year. He'll usually play third base, but Valencia said he's also comfortable playing outfield and second base.

Melvin said he talked with Valencia before the game Wednesday and told him the A's do things a little differently than most clubs.

"I know he wants to play every day, and the opportunities are always there based on how you do and how you respond to certain situations," Melvin said, "but if you don't start, it doesn't mean you won't have an impact on the game."

Valencia could be used as a pinch-hitter and a late defensive specialist. Brett Lawrie played second base for the A's on Wednesday, and it's clear Melvin is more comfortable with Lawrie -- who came up as a second baseman -- there than Valencia.

"I feel all right over there," Valencia said of second. "I wouldn't say that would be a position I'd want to play on a regular basis. I'm a bigger guy -- I'm not as fast as your typical middle infielder -- but if you needed me to hold the position down for a day or two I think I could do it."

He also feels as though he can contribute in the outfield.

"I've been learning it on the fly," Valencia said. "It's a different position, but I kind of like the challenge. By no means am I a Gold Glove left fielder right now."

Valencia, who got to Oakland around 5 p.m. PT on Tuesday, said he's still getting used to the Bay Area traffic, but everyone made him feel welcome in the clubhouse right away.

"The guys are great," he said. "It seems like a good, fun clubhouse. It's a little bit different in here, but it's definitely going to be a good experience."

Worth noting

- Coco Crisp was scratched from Wednesday's lineup with neck stiffness before grounding out as a pinch-hitter in the ninth inning and playing left field in the 10th.

"Any time we get a little bit of stiffness in there, we're going to give him a day off," Melvin said before the game.

- Still recovering from lower back tightness, Josh Reddick was also out of the starting lineup, but he too came off the bench and went 0-for-1 with a walk while playing right field.

Poor execution stings Leon on go-ahead slam

By: Trevor Hass / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- When Arnold Leon got Adam Jones to pop out to second with no outs and the bases loaded, it looked like there was a chance he could somehow escape the 10th inning unscathed.

But Chris Davis made sure that didn't happen, clobbering a go-ahead grand slam to left-center that propelled the O's to a 7-3 series-clinching win over the A's on Wednesday afternoon at the Coliseum.

"I was trying to go away to get a ground-ball double play, " Leon said, "but I didn't execute very well the way I wanted to."

The last time the A's allowed an extra-inning grand slam at home was in 1989, when the Red Sox's Dwight Evans hit one off Dennis Eckersley.

Leon, who was recalled from Triple-A Nashville on Monday, is expected to have a longer-than-usual stint with the A's this time around, but it didn't get off to the start he was looking for.

The right-hander allowed singles to Caleb Joseph and Manny Machado to open the inning. The A's elected to intentionally walk Gerardo Parra to load the bases with no outs.

"We got the popup from Jones, which is a pretty tough customer to have to deal with there," manager Bob Melvin said, "and now we are in a position to get a double play."

Instead, Davis hit his second slam of the season, the sixth of his career and the O's fifth in extra innings since 1980.

"[The count] goes to 3-2," Melvin said. "The ball was down, but Davis is a pretty good low-ball hitter, and in a 3-2 count he was looking for a fastball there."