

# ASTROS DAILY CLIPS

## FRIDAY, AUGUST 7, 2015

### **Correa keeps coming through in clutch**

*Astros rookie phenom launches late 2-run HR in victory*

By: Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Astros rookie shortstop Carlos Correa hasn't been shy about being forthright with the media during the first two months of his Major League career, so when he was asked if the go-ahead homer he clubbed in the eighth inning of a 5-4 win over the A's on Thursday was the biggest of his career, he was honest.

"Definitely," he said. "We come from a rough series against Texas, and for me to get that home run to give us the lead in the eighth, it was a great moment, definitely the best homer I've hit so far."

In 51 games as a rookie, Correa already has 14 home runs. His first-inning single snapped an 0-for-11 funk, yet he's still batting .319 with four doubles, seven home runs and 17 RBIs in 19 games since the All-Star break.

The Astros were trailing, 2-1, in the eighth against the A's when he crushed a 2-0 pitch from Fernando Rodriguez and sent it high over the left-field wall to put Houston ahead.

"Just looking for a pitch, a good pitch to hit, I got a fastball right down the middle and I was able to drive it out of the park," he said.

Astros manager A.J. Hinch, marveling at his young shortstop, said before the game Correa was the kind of player fans would make sure to be in their seats when he bats. Thursday was a good example of why.

"We really have a lot of belief when he's in the batter's box or when he's handling the ball in the field," he said. "We're pretty fired up to win this game. We went through a tough little stretch here in Texas with some close games, some games we should have won, put ourselves in position to win and showed some resiliency like we have for four months now."

### **Gomez makes over-the-shoulder basket grab**

*Astros center fielder runs down drive to save at least run*

By: Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The Astros traded for center fielder Carlos Gomez mostly because of his offense, hoping his bat and his speed would help lengthen their offense. The fact he's a Gold Glove center fielder certainly helped Houston's desire to get Gomez.

In Thursday's 5-4, 10-inning win at the Coliseum, Gomez's defense saved one run -- and perhaps two -- when he made a long run in the fifth inning to track down a drive by the A's Eric Sogard and made an over-the-shoulder catch, sliding to the ground as he caught the ball. The play earned Gomez a round of applause from the A's fans.

According to Statcast™, Gomez reached a top speed of 14.454 mph. His first step was 0.469 seconds and his acceleration was 2.072 seconds.

There were runners at first and second and no outs when Sogard struck the ball, and both of them could have scored if Gomez hadn't come down with it. Ike Davis tagged up to go to third on the play to put runners on the corners, but starter Scott Feldman got Billy Butler to fly out to center before striking out Coco Crisp to end the fifth.

## Lowrie quickly redeems himself for error

*Astros third baseman delivers winning hit after miscue leads to A's rally*

By: Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- How's that for redemption?

Astros third baseman Jed Lowrie, whose throwing error in the ninth inning helped lead to a pair of unearned runs that allowed the A's to tie the game, came through in the 10th with an RBI double to send the Astros to a 5-4 win Thursday to snap a five-game road losing streak.

"I felt like I put us in that situation in the ninth and just grateful for the opportunity to come up there in the 10th and come through," said Lowrie, who spent the previous two seasons with the A's.

The hit was only one of two for the Astros with runners in scoring position. Carlos Correa hit a two-run homer in the eighth to help the Astros to a 4-2 lead, but Lowrie's miscue in the ninth was costly. Houston closer Luke Gregerson walked Stephen Vogt to start the inning and then got Brett Lawrie to hit a grounder to Lowrie, but his throw to second sailed wide of the bag.

The A's had runners on the corners and scored on a single by Ike Davis and a fielder's choice off the bat of Billy Burns, who narrowly beat the throw to first to avoid would have been a game-ending double play. Astros second baseman Jose Altuve led off the 10th with a single, stole second and was at third with two outs when Lowrie doubled to left field.

"I feel responsible for the inning like that," Lowrie said. "You got an opportunity to get the lead runner right there and you know instead of having a guy on first with one out, they've got first and third nobody out."

Lowrie was making only his sixth start at third base since returning from a thumb injury that cost him more than three months. He was playing shortstop when he was injured, but the emergence of Correa at short forced him to switch positions upon his return.

He wasn't about to make any excuses about learning a new position.

"I'm not going to say no, but it's just a [bad] throw," he said. "There's really no other way to say it. It's definitely not acceptable, but you know I just need to continue to work at it."

The Astros had struggled in the clutch during a three-game sweep at the hands of the Rangers, going 3-for-20 with runners in scoring position in one-run losses on Tuesday and Wednesday.

"Even though we lost those three games in Texas, we fought through some tough times, we were never out of those games," Lowrie said. "I think that's the mark of a good team. So for us to come back and win this one, I think that's a good first step."

## A's rally late, but Astros prevail in 10

By: Trevor Hass and Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Jed Lowrie atoned for his throwing error an inning earlier by driving home Jose Altuve with a double to left in the 10th inning, sending the Astros to a series-opening 5-4 win over the A's at the Coliseum on Thursday night in a back-and-forth matchup.

"I felt like I put us in that situation in the ninth and just grateful for the opportunity to come up there in the 10th and come through," Lowrie said.

The A's, who entered the game 0-53 when losing after eight innings, trailed by a 4-2 margin heading to the bottom of the ninth. Lowrie helped his former club by throwing the ball away on a Brett Lawrie grounder, sending Stephen Vogt to third and allowing Lawrie to reach at first. Ike Davis singled home Vogt to slice the deficit to 4-3 with no outs. Three batters later, Billy Burns avoided a game-ending double play, beating the throw to first, bringing home Lawrie and helping send the game into extras. The call stood after a review.

The A's led, 2-1, when starter Aaron Brooks departed after seven, but Astros rookie phenom Carlos Correa crushed a two-run homer to left-center in the eighth, his 14th since making his Major League debut June 8. He has five homers in his past 10 games. The shot came off Fernando Rodriguez with two outs and Altuve at second, snapping a 34 2/3 homerless-innings streak for the A's reliever.

"I was trying to go away, just totally missed my spot," Rodriguez said. "The pitch was right down the middle, up and in, pretty much anybody could have hit it out."

Brooks tossed seven innings of one-run ball, yielding just four hits and striking out seven. Vogt and Lawrie each hit solo shots as the A's fell to 11-26 in one-run games.

#### MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Correa comes through in clutch: The Astros have struggled to come up with big hits during their road losing streak, going 6-for-27 with runners in scoring position while getting swept by the Rangers before coming to Oakland. Their first hit with a runner in scoring position Thursday came in the eighth when Correa blasted a two-run homer -- his 14th -- to give Houston a 3-2 lead.

"We come from a rough series against Texas and for me to get that home run to give us the lead in the eighth, it was a great moment, definitely the best homer I've hit so far," said Correa, who is hitting .319 since the All-Star break.

Making a name for himself: Brooks has allowed just two runs in 14 1/3 innings in his two starts with the A's. He threw 108 pitches and pounded his fist into his glove in excitement after striking out Jason Castro for the final out of the seventh. He is one of four pitchers to throw seven innings or more and yield one run or fewer in each of his first two outings with the A's.

"He pitched great," A's manager Bob Melvin said of Brooks. "That's all you can ask for. It would have been nice to reward him."

Redemption for Lowrie: The A's pushed a pair of unearned runs across in the ninth to the the game after Lowrie's error. Lowrie quickly atoned for the miscue, though, when he shot a two-out RBI double into left field in the 10th off Edward Mujica.

"I feel responsible for the inning like that," Lowrie said of the ninth. "You got an opportunity to get the lead runner right there and you know instead of having a guy on first with one out they've got first and third nobody out."

Making it close: Vogt's solo shot tied the game at 1 in the second and helped him break out of a 2-for-34 streak. Lawrie's blast in the fifth was measured at 452 feet and hit near the luxury suites in left-center, prompting a "Wow" from Melvin as Lawrie returned to the dugout. The A's tacked on two in the ninth, but couldn't rally once again in the 10th.

"That was a very impressive home run," the A's Ike Davis said of Lawrie's mammoth shot. "Him and Stephen, those balls were crushed."

#### QUOTABLE

"We needed that. If we ever needed a reminder on how hard it is to get wins -- and we've gotten a lot of them this year -- that's one of them. That's a tough one. But a much-needed win. I thought we played pretty well, pretty resilient. We were tested in every way and guys were into it. We needed to win that game." -- Hinch

"I thought it was a homer for sure. This park is weird sometimes. I thought it was a no-doubt home run." -- Davis, on Coco Crisp's deep fly in the ninth that would have won the game had it reached the fence

#### GOMEZ MAKES AMAZING GRAB

Flashing his Gold Glove skills, Astros center fielder Carlos Gomez made a long run in the fifth inning to track down a drive by the A's Eric Sogard and made an over-the-shoulder catch, sliding to the ground as he caught the ball. The play earned Gomez a round of applause from the A's fans.

#### HARRIS RELISHES FIRST SAVE

Astros reliever Will Harris picked up his first career save by throwing a perfect 10th, needing only nine pitches.

"I've been in tied games and stuff like that before in extra innings, but just happened to have the lead this time and wanted to throw strikes and did that for the most part," Harris said. "Good defense behind me. We needed that win. It was a lot of fun to come back like that."

#### SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Oakland reliever Fernando Abad allowed his first run -- albeit an unearned one -- since July 8. He had gone 11 consecutive outings (11 2/3 innings) without yielding a run.

## WHAT'S NEXT

Astros: Ace Dallas Keuchel (13-5, 2.35 ERA) looks to extend his franchise record to 34 consecutive starts of at least six innings when he gets the ball in Friday's 9:05 p.m. CT game against the A's. Keuchel is second in the AL in innings (157 2/3) and is tied for first with teammate Collin McHugh in wins and is third in ERA (2.35).

A's: Sonny Gray (11-4, 2.12) takes the mound for Oakland in the battle of the aces Friday at 7:05 p.m. PT. Gray has compiled a 1.17 ERA and .205 opponents' batting average over his past three starts, but has just one win and two no-decisions during that span.

## Astros unveil plan for McCullers, Velasquez

*Club to use rookies in different roles down the stretch*

By: Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The Astros are still counting on using rookie pitchers Lance McCullers and Vincent Velasquez down the stretch, though it appears Velasquez would likely be tabbed in a relief role while McCullers will rejoin the rotation at some point. Both are at Double-A Corpus Christi.

It's been well documented how the Astros are being careful with both of the youngsters, sending them to the Minor Leagues to limit their innings. McCullers has been working with pitching coach Doug Brocail at Double-A Corpus Christi, and Velasquez on Wednesday threw in relief for the Hooks.

Velasquez, who threw 2 2/3 scoreless innings of relief for the Astros on Saturday, tossed three scoreless innings Wednesday. He hasn't started since throwing six innings against Boston on July 21 at Minute Maid Park, and manager A.J. Hinch said he'd likely be used in relief later this season in Houston.

"We could always stretch him back out if we need to, but we've got a few starter options," Hinch said. "He brings a lot of dynamic to the bullpen, too. It's not just about the innings. It's also about what we feel he can do for us in the final stretch of the season. Coming out of the 'pen, he could be a little dynamic velocity-wise than what we have."

Velasquez, who throws in the upper 90s, is viewed as a starter down the road, and Hinch wants the option of being able to build him up to 85-90 pitches if needed this year. In nine games (seven starts) with the Astros this year, he's 1-1 with a 3.67 ERA.

"We've got to strike the balance of getting him accustomed to being up a couple of days in a row versus spot starting or entering the rotation," he said.

McCullers has been terrific for the Astros, but didn't escape the first inning Monday in Arlington and was sent down. It was a move made to, again, preserve his innings. He's 5-4 with a 3.17 ERA in 14 starts for the Astros.

"We're really focused in on conditioning and rest and recovery [at Corpus Christi]," Hinch said. "As it starts to trend towards the time we're going to considering bring him back, we'll obviously increase pitching activity and get him ready to start again for us."

## Keuchel opposes fellow ace Gray in Oakland

By: Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

In one of the top pitching matchups of the season, the Astros and A's will send aces Dallas Keuchel and Sonny Gray to the mound Friday at the Coliseum.

Gray ranks second in the American League and fourth in the Majors in ERA, and suffered one of his losses this year to the Astros when he gave up three earned runs in five innings May 19 in Houston.

Keuchel set a franchise record in his last start when he threw at least six innings for the 33rd consecutive start. He's second in the AL in innings (157 2/3), tied for first with teammate Collin McHugh in wins and is third in ERA (2.35).

"It's must-see TV because I think those are two of the better pitchers that may have been more unheralded than they needed to be heading into the year," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "I'm going to have a pretty good seat."

Three things to know about this game

- The Astros had lost 11 of 12 on the road before Thursday's 5-4 win in 10 innings. During that rough stretch, second baseman Jose Altuve batted .173 (9-for-52) and rookie shortstop Carlos Correa hit .140 (6-for-43). On Thursday, Altuve went 3-for-5 and scored twice, while Correa went 2-for-4 with a two-run shot, his 14th homer of the year.

- A's reliever Fernando Abad, formerly of the Astros, hadn't allowed a run in his past 11 games entering Thursday, a span of 11 2/3 innings. In Thursday's loss, he allowed a run in the eighth.

- Altuve entered Thursday with a 16-game hitting streak in Oakland during which he was batting .366 (26-for--71) with eight RBIs and nine runs. He extended it to 17 with a fifth-inning single.

## **Rookie trio combines for Tri-City no-hitter**

*Astros prospects McCanna, Garza and Person issue just one walk in team's first no-no since 2008*

By: Alex M. Smith / MLB.com

Class A Short Season Tri-City leaned on a trio of first-year players to complete a team no-hitter against Aberdeen on Thursday night.

The ValleyCats won, 5-0, thanks to the work of three of Houston's 2015 Draft picks: Kevin McCanna (13th round, Rice), Ralph Garza (29th round, Oklahoma) and Zac Person (ninth round, LSU). McCanna started the game and allowed the team's only blemish -- a walk -- in four innings of near-perfect work that included five strikeouts.

Garza was fantastic, striking out seven batters in four frames. He turned the ball over to Person in the ninth and the 22-year-old required 15 pitches to sit down the final three hitters.

Tri-City last had a no-hitter in 2008, when Shane Wolf, David Miller and Ashton Mowdy helped the ValleyCats defeat Oneonta, 10-0.

## **Jed Lowrie redeems himself to send the Astros over the Athletics in the 10th, 5-4**

By: Evan Drellich / Houston Chronicle

OAKLAND, Calif. — There were more than 800 dogs at O.co Coliseum on Thursday night, most with more bite than the Astros offense outside of Carlos Correa, who demolished a go-ahead home run with two out in the eighth inning, the latest eye-opener from an unreal talent who's becoming a shoe-in for Rookie of the Year.

Correa's 14th blast didn't hold up long, though, as the A's tied at 4 on two unearned runs in the ninth inning, helped by a throwing error from Jed Lowrie at third base. He didn't mince words afterward describing the throw, either.

"I feel responsible for the inning," Lowrie said.

Redemption came one frame later.

Freshly moved to the hot corner because of Correa's emergence at shortstop, Lowrie made up for his gaffe with an opposite-field, line-drive double in the 10th inning Thursday night, bringing home Jose Altuve from third base with the tie-breaking run in a 5-4 Astros win over the A's.

"Just grateful for the opportunity to come up there in the 10th and come through," said Lowrie, who left the A's as a free agent in the offseason.

The win snapped a three-game losing streak for the Astros, who've had particular trouble on the road.

"We needed that," manager A.J. Hinch said. "If we ever needed a reminder on how hard it is to get wins -- and we've gotten a lot of them this year -- that's one of them. That's a tough one. But a much-needed win. I thought we played pretty well, pretty resilient. We were tested in every way and guys were into it. We needed to win that game."

Will Harris closed it out in the bottom of the inning for his first career save.

Correa, whose two-run homer put the Astros up 3-2 in the eighth, had a great chance to put the Astros ahead again in the 10th, one batter prior to Lowrie's big two-out hit, which came from the left side in the 10th against Edward Mujica.

With Altuve on third base — he was a catalyst all night — and one out, the A's chose to pitch to Correa with the infield in. Correa then chose to go after a 3-0 pitch, which he skied on the infield.

Lowrie saw all fastballs from Mujica.

"I know he's got a good splitter, so that was in the back of my mind but you know I was able to put a good swing on the heater away," Lowrie said.

The Astros scored an insurance run in the eighth for a 4-2 lead, but closer Luke Gregerson couldn't close it out, starting the frame with a Stephen Vogt walk. That was exacerbated on Lowrie's throwing error that allowed the next batter to reach, Brett Lawrie.

"It's definitely not acceptable," Lowrie said.

Ike Davis' single plated Vogt to cut the lead to 4-3.

Three batters later, speedster Billy Burns stepped up with the bases loaded and one out. His slow grounder to second gave him just enough time to beat out what was nearly a game-ending double play. Correa's relay to first base was thrown with all the mustard he had, but after a review that took about two minutes, umpire Cory Blaser's safe call was upheld, tying the game at 4.

The Astros had trailed 2-1 since the fifth inning and hadn't scored since the first inning when Correa ripped Fernando Rodriguez's 2-0 fastball, which found way too much of the plate, to left-center in the eighth.

"We come from a rough series against Texas, and for me to get that home run to give us the lead in the eighth, it was a great moment," Correa said. "Definitely the best homer I've hit so far."

Altuve, who singled with one out and stole second in the eighth, was bouncing toward third base, his hand raised as he waited for the ball to leave. And it had plenty of hang time.

A Lowrie walk and, after a pitching change, a Colby Rasmus single combined with some shoddy outfield defense to push the Astros lead to 4-2 before the eighth ended.

Homefield advantage doesn't matter as much in baseball as it does basketball or football, so it'd be folly to peg the Astros' recent road woes simply on the venue. But before Correa stepped in against the A's bullpen, the Astros still seemed listless and the A's were cruising on bring-your-dog night.

Rookie pitcher Aaron Brooks, a 25-year-old righty making his third career start and just his second for the A's, struck out seven in as many innings, allowing just four hits.

A pair of full-count solo shots were the early difference against righty Scott Feldman, who gave the Astros plenty in six innings and allowed a pair of solo homers on 3-2 counts.

Vogt drove a low pitch a long way out to left-center in the second inning, tying the game at 1 after Lowrie's sac fly briefly put the Astros ahead in the first. Brett Lawrie drilled a similar Feldman pitch, low and over the plate, out in fifth.

The three-game sweep in Arlington the Astros came to Oakland to shake off can be chalked up to a hot team going cold. But the A's are a stripped-down club — hello, Scott Kazmir — that the Astros should be able to take advantage of down the stretch.

## **Dan Straily optioned to AAA Fresno after clearing waivers**

By: Evan Drellich / Houston Chronicle

Righty Dan Straily was optioned to Class AAA Fresno on Thursday. He had to clear waivers first because of a technicality: he was first put on a major league roster more than three calendar years ago.

But there are different types of waivers in baseball, and players are essentially never claimed off this type — optional waivers — because of what is essentially a gentleman's agreement between teams.

The waivers that teams will put players on this month to try to make trades after the July 31 deadline, for example, is a different classification of waiver.

If Straily is called up and subsequently optioned again this season, he will not need to go through optional waivers again. He can be moved freely the rest of the season.

Lefty Scott Kazmir felt leg cramps Wednesday, but he and Hinch said there was no expected issue moving forward. Kazmir, back in the yard he called home for a season and a half, caught up with his former teammates in the outfield Thursday afternoon.

Strength and conditioning guru Jake Beiting is back with the team after he and his wife celebrated the birth of twins.

The expectation is Roberto Hernandez will elect free agency. He was designated for assignment when Jed Lowrie returned to the roster.

Jose Veras was released from Class AAA Fresno on July 30. He had a 5.68 ERA in 18 innings.

Former Astros pitcher Darin Downs was the winning pitcher against Sugar Land on Thursday night, now pitching for the Long Island Ducks. The Astros released Downs from Fresno earlier this year.

## **Hinch will use Marisnick where his range is most effective**

By: Evan Drellich / Houston Chronicle

OAKLAND, Calif. — Carlos Gomez's presence in center field means Jake Marisnick is going to man the biggest corner, depending on the ballpark. At the A's O.co Coliseum, that's left field. In other yards, it'll be right field.

"He's so athletic, he can make any play," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "In a lot of ways, the corner, he adapts pretty well to the different angles. You know, if anything, he's got to adjust to not being the quarterback in the outfield. And that can create the havoc. He's fun to watch out there. ... Eventually I'll probably give Gomez a day off."

George Springer (fractured right wrist) is to visit the doctor after this road trip and isn't going to add any new baseball activities to his regime until then. Swinging a bat, namely, has to wait.

But upon Springer's presumed return, and assuming the health of Gomez and Preston Tucker, the Astros outfield starts to look crowded — and that's without looking at the first-base situation that can ooze over into the outfield with Evan Gattis and Chris Carter.

The team is already carrying 13 hitters, whereas it carried 13 pitchers most of the season. Marisnick entered Thursday hitting .180 from the start of July.

"Glad he's going to get a couple days in a row (starting)," Hinch said. "Unfortunately, it's because (Preston) Tucker's arm is bothering him. We need to get Jake going offensively as well."

Tucker said his right arm was feeling better after being hit by a pitch in the triceps on Tuesday. The arm became very stiff initially, but he was able to swing a bat Thursday.

## The Houston Astros and the delicate balance of the Wacha Rules

By: Evan Drellich / Houston Chronicle

OAKLAND, Calif. — The shuffling of Lance McCullers — and some of the subsequent roster movement that's followed of late — is all tied to a simple blueprint, the Wacha Rules.

"We're really focused on conditioning and rest and recovery," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said of McCullers, who's in the minor leagues. "And as it starts to trend towards a time when we're going to consider bringing him back, we'll obviously increase that pitching activity."

Sounds familiar.

Cardinals righthander Michael Wacha was demoted to the minors for roughly two months, from mid-June to mid-August, after first coming to the majors as a 21-year-old at the end of May 2013. He made just six starts at Class AAA in that stretch, turning 22.

Wacha had 13 days of rest between his first and second outing during that minor league stretch. He had seven days between the second and third, and 13 again before the next. Then he resumed a more normal schedule, with five days down before his second-to-last minors start, and finally, a regular four days leading to his final outing in the minors, on Aug. 4, 2013.

"I would make a start about every 10 days," Wacha said recently. "I did that for about a month, made about three starts, and three or four starts in a month, and then that just limited my innings throughout that month, and they were able to call me back up in September or late August and be able to pitch in September, and also in October. (That was) instead of being shut down and using my innings in July I guess."

Wacha's minor league innings that season were kept to 85. It was his first full year in pro ball, as a first rounder drafted out of Texas A&M in 2012. He threw 64  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings in the big league regular season, and 30  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings more in the playoffs.

That made for a total of 180  $\frac{1}{3}$  innings, the last of them in the Game 6 of the World Series. In the National League Championship Series, Wacha was named the MVP with 13  $\frac{2}{3}$  shutout innings.

That's what the Astros want from McCullers — although with 105  $\frac{2}{3}$  combined innings at this point, the Astros hope McCullers can finish with a lower total than Wacha did that year. McCullers threw 97 innings in the minors a year ago.

Vince Velasquez, meanwhile, is "most likely" to stay in the bullpen this season barring a need in the rotation, Hinch said Thursday. The rookie rightly threw three scoreless innings for Class AA Corpus Christi on Wednesday.

The desire to keep Velasquez in the 'pen isn't simply because of innings limits. Velasquez brings a high-90s velocity to the relief corps that the Astros don't have outside of Josh Fields.

There's so much for teams to think about in these situations. The Mets, with young arms Matt Harvey, Jacob deGrom and Noah Syndergaard are going through similar concerns.

The player's health is paramount. Velasquez has had injury problems in the past, but he's fared very well since the start of the year.

"My whole career a lot of people saw me as like the injury guy, 'cause I've always been hurt, from (Tommy John surgery) to lat problems. Oblique, leg, whatever," Velasquez said before his demotion. "And I feel 100 percent. I feel really good. I'm in good hands with a good training staff here."

Important too is keeping the pitcher on routine.

"It was pretty crazy, you know, going 10-12 days. It's hard to stay in a routine like that," Wacha said. "I was also learning my curveball then, and so I was able to pitch in a game and then I'd have 10 days off, but I'd also throw like two sides, two to three sides or so, be able to work on different pitches and be able to refine my location and my command. And you know, use that to my advantage."

Then there's the opportunity to win. The Nationals famously held Stephen Strasburg out of the 2012 postseason, a scenario teams don't want to repeat.



Strasburg's agent, Scott Boras, is also the agent to McCullers and Velasquez.

"From the standpoint of pitchability, when you're conducting irregular pitching patterns, it's more difficult, but from the standpoint of long term viability of the players, and their best interest (absolutely it's good for McCullers and Velasquez)," Boras said recently. "(Strasburg is) ... available to the franchise for probably, you could argue, a better team, a better chance to win now than then (in 2012). But I think everyone's going to question that. And wonder whether it was the best thing to do. For us, for his health, what the doctors told us to do, we went by doctors' counsel as to what the decisions were. 160 innings and that's it."

At the same time, you can't win unless you get to the postseason.

Would the Astros be better off with Velasquez and McCullers than a revolving door of others as they try to ward off the Angels? The bullpen has been strained of late, and the Astros are carrying a 12-man pitching staff after a 13-man staff worked so well most of the season.

"Some of this movement we've needed on a need base, where we've got to reset our bullpen, but we're always cautious with the last part of development players, particularly young pitching," Hinch said. "And they come fast. You have to be ready to handle the delicate time, they're finishing their development."

## **Lowrie atones for error, Astros edge A's 5-4 in 10 innings**

By: Associated Press / espn.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Jed Lowrie is still adjusting to playing third base for the Astros. His throwing error in the ninth inning that led to a pair of unearned runs was a perfect example.

His swing, however, is as sound as it's been all season.

Lowrie hit an RBI double off Edward Mujica with two outs in the 10th to make up for his costly miscue, and Houston beat the Oakland Athletics 5-4 on Thursday night.

"We needed that," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "If we ever needed a reminder on how hard it is to get wins . that's one of them. A much-needed win. We were tested in every way."

Carlos Correa launched a go-ahead homer in a three-run eighth that gave the Astros a 4-2 lead. But the AL West leaders had to rally again after the A's scored twice off closer Luke Gregerson in the ninth.

Lowrie aided the Oakland comeback with a wild throw from third base. But the former Oakland shortstop, who drove in Houston's first run with a sacrifice fly, came through an inning later.

Jose Altuve led off the 10th with his third hit. He stole second on a pitchout and was sacrificed to third by Carlos Gomez. Mujica (2-4) retired Correa on a popup before Lowrie doubled to left field.

"I felt like I put us in that situation in the ninth," Lowrie said. "Just grateful for the opportunity to come up there in the 10th and come through."

Gregerson (5-1) was credited with the win after his fourth blown save in 26 chances. Will Harris got three outs for his first major league save, helped by a fine play from Altuve at second base.

It was the fourth time this season Houston won when trailing going into the eighth.

"That's the mark of a good team," Lowrie said. "For us to come back and win this one, that's a good first step."

Stephen Vogt and Brett Lawrie homered for Oakland, which wasted a strong outing by rookie Aaron Brooks.

Both teams blew late leads.

The A's were up 2-1 heading into the eighth before Correa hit a two-run homer off reliever Felix Rodriguez.

It was Correa's second home run in four days and sixth in the last 10 games. The 20-year-old rookie is the youngest position player in the majors and the only shortstop in the last century to hit 14 home runs in his first 51 games.

After Correa's drive gave Houston a 3-2 lead, Lowrie walked and scored when Colby Rasmus singled softly to left-center and the ball got past Billy Burns for an error.

Gregerson couldn't make it hold up.

He issued a leadoff walk before Lowrie's throwing error put runners at the corners with none out. Ike Davis hit an RBI single, and Burns drove in the tying run when he barely beat out a potential double-play grounder.

"It's tough. We've lost many games like this this year," Oakland manager Bob Melvin said. "It comes down to a bunch of little things. We came up a little short. We've done that a lot this year."

Brooks, part of the July 28 trade that sent Ben Zobrist to Toronto, gave up four hits and had a career-high seven strikeouts in seven innings. He allowed only two runners over his final five innings and left with a 2-1 lead.

Vogt homered off Houston starter Scott Feldman in the second. Feldman gave up two runs and five hits in six innings.

Lawrie homered leading off the fifth.

#### TRAINER'S ROOM

Astros: OF Preston Tucker did not start for the second straight game due to a bruised right arm. He entered on defense in the late innings. ... RHP Dan Straily was sent to Triple-A Fresno. Straily was designated for assignment Wednesday and cleared waivers.

Athletics: Former closer Sean Doolittle (left shoulder strain) will begin a rehab assignment with Class A Stockton on Friday. ... LF Coco Crisp (neck) and RF Josh Reddick (back) returned to the starting lineup.

#### UP NEXT

Astros: LHP Dallas Keuchel (13-5) seeks his AL-leading 14th win Friday when he faces the A's for the third time this season. In his previous two starts against Oakland this year, Keuchel has allowed only one unearned run in 16 innings.

Athletics: RHP Sonny Gray (11-4) has a 1.17 ERA over his past three starts but just one win and two no-decisions to show for it.

## **Fresno Tacos attract national spotlight**

*Record-breaking crowd of 16,916 are treated to another victory*

By: Fresno Grizzlies

FRESNO, Calif. - The Fresno Tacos (65-47) had too much spice for the Sacramento River Cats (52-61) on Thursday night at Chukchansi Park as they grabbed a 7-4 win and another round of national headlines. The victory was met with a three-minute segment on SportsCenter featuring clips of the team in full Tacos uniform and the Taco Truck Throwdown 5 promotion. A record-breaking crowd of 16,916 devoured tacos and provided an incredible atmosphere to help power Fresno to their sixth straight win.

Matt Duffy played King Taco by going 2-4 with a double, homer, four RBI, and two runs scored. His saucy two-run homer (16) in the fifth put the Tacos back on top 6-4 and set the course for the three-run win. The third baseman was also instrumental in providing Fresno with the early lead by doubling in Jonathan Villar and Alex Presley in the bottom of the first, while scoring one batter later on a Jon Singleton sacrifice fly to make it 3-0.

The four RBI night by Duffy pushed his season total to 84, which ranks fourth overall in all of Minor League Baseball. He's on pace to finish with 107 RBI for the season, which would place him one shy of the franchise record set by Scott McClain in 2008.

#### Earlier On

The Tacos held onto their early lead until the top of the fifth when Mark Appel couldn't seem to find a way to get the third out. He retired the first two batters of the inning on ground outs, but followed by allowing a walk, single, and another walk. He'd exit with a 4-3 lead, but reliever Jordan Jankowski gave up a game-tying RBI single to Darren Ford, with the run charged to Appel. Despite giving up the inherited run, Jankowski steadied Fresno and picked up his sixth win of the season after turning in 2.1 scoreless IP.

#### Homer Shy

Jonathan Villar went 3-5 with a double, triple, and run scored, falling a homer short of the cycle. He struck out and popped out in his final two at bats.

Friday night

The Tacos are now 6-0 on their current homestand and will continue it Friday night when they turn back into the Fresno Grizzlies for the 7:05 PM game against the Sacramento River Cats. Fresno sends lefty Brett Oberholtzer to the mound to take on right-hander Chris Stratton. Promotions for the evening include Postgame Fireworks presented by 4G Wireless, Christian Fellowship Night, and Boy Scout Night. Gates to the park open at 6:05 PM, with first pitch scheduled for 7:05 PM.

## **Jensen, Pinder Push Hounds**

*Midland Leads Hooks by 4 Games*

By: Corpus Christi Hooks

CORPUS CHRISTI - Midland right-hander Chris Jensen took the mound Thursday night at Whataburger Field with a 2-0 lead that soon evaporated into a one-run deficit.

The former University of San Diego star pushed through, a Jack Mayfield solo homer in the fourth the only other blemish in an 12-5 RockHounds win over Corpus Christi before 5,925.

Jensen (7-9) and a 17-hit attack snapped the Hooks' four-game winning streak. He was lifted for Brendan McCurry after 6 2/3 innings, seven hits, a walk, and three strikeouts. Jensen threw 26 pitches in the first, 36 over his last four full frames. He retired 10 of the last 11 men faced in an 85-pitch outing.

Three-hole hitter Chad Pinder's 14th home run gave Midland a 2-0 first-inning advantage against Kyle Westwood. Pinder's shot to left was preceded by a Colin Walsh single.

The Hooks (23-18; 71-40) didn't wait long to retaliate. Jon Kemmer's third home run of 2015 off Jensen was a two-out, three-run, opposite-field shot. Singles from lead-off man Danry Vasquez and A.J. Reed sandwiched the outs before Kemmer unloaded for his 15th bomb.

Mayfield joined the night's HR club on the first pitch of the home fourth, powering his fifth yard shot to the Goodwill Zone in left field.

Four consecutive singles to begin the fifth - including a run-producer from Walsh - pulled the RockHounds to within a run at 4-3 and pushed Westwood out of the game. The tying run crossed on a bases-loaded wild pitch by reliever Aaron West, the go-ahead score when Matt Olson rapped a screaming infield single to first.

Over four-plus innings and 86 pitches, Westwood yielded nine hits and struck out two.

Midland (27-14; 62-49) added a run in the sixth, Wade Kirkland doubling with an out before Jaycob Brugman's RBI single up the middle. The 'Hounds hung five on Travis Ballew in a six-run ninth, Josh Whitaker contributing a two-run double to left-center. Pinder added a three-run double off Chris Cotton to finish with five RBIs and three hits; Olson and Kirkland posted three hits as well.

Conrad Gregor had a late homer for Corpus Christi off Ryan Doolittle.

Kemmer and Colin Moran have hit in six straight.

Parker Frazier (3-1) goes for the RockHounds Friday night against Edison Frias (0-0). First pitch is 7:05 and gates open at 5:30.

metroPCS presents MMA Night with Corpus Christi's own Roger Narvaez. Bud Light Friday Fireworks and the Texas Lottery Lucky Scratch-Off Dance-Off highlight postgame.

## **Sixth-inning rally keys win over Mavs**

*Ramsay extends streak to 13, Davis homers in third straight*

By: Spenser Smith / Lancaster JetHawks

LANCASTER, Calif. - After playing catch-up through the first four innings, the JetHawks rode a three-run rally in the sixth inning to a 9-4 victory over the High Desert Mavericks on Thursday night at The Hangar.

Kevin Comer allowed two runs in both of his first two innings of work but recovered to hold the Mavericks (58-49) scoreless over his final three innings. Tandem starter Austin Chrismon (5-2) tossed four scoreless innings for the JetHawks (55-55), allowing just two hits and striking out four.

Marc Wik went 3-for-4 and drove in three runs for Lancaster. An eighth-inning single extended James Ramsay's hitting streak to 13 games, and a first-inning home run gave J.D. Davis a homer in his third consecutive game.

With runners on first and second, Jamie Ritchie delivered a go-ahead RBI-double to center field off David Ledbetter (1-9) to break a 4-4 tie for the JetHawks in the bottom of the sixth inning. Ritchie would score on a Chase McDonald sacrifice fly, and Wik added a RBI-bunt single against reliever Felix Carvallo.

Royce Bolinger had given High Desert an early lead with a two-run homer in the first inning, but Davis tied the game with his own two-run homer in the bottom half. After the Mavericks retook the lead in the second on a two-run single by Isiah Kiner-Falefa, a Wik RBI-triple brought the JetHawks within one run.

Lancaster tied the score in the bottom of the fourth, as Wik singled to left field to score Mott Hyde from second.

After having taken the lead in the sixth, the JetHawks added two insurance runs in the bottom of the eighth on Ramsay's two-run single to right field off Dakota Watts.

The series continues on Friday with first pitch scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Akeem Bostick (2-4, 6.32) will pitch for the JetHawks, and the Mavericks will send Richelson Pena (9-6, 4.64) to the mound. The JetHawks will be hosting Princess in the Park Night. The Friday Night Fireworks Extravaganza will feature princess-themed music, and princesses will be in attendance for photos with fans.

## **Bandits blank Hot Rods for sweep, 10th straight win**

*Barrios extends streak of 41 consecutive scoreless innings by Quad Cities starters*

By: Jess Knaster / Quad Cities River Bandits

Agapito Barrios threw six shutout innings, allowing two hits and striking out five while walking one, and a solo homer by designated hitter Bryan Muniz in the fourth inning was all the River Bandits needed, as they swept the Bowling Green Hot Rods, 2-0, and won their 10th straight game in front of 4,317 at Modern Woodmen Park Thursday night.

The River Bandits (27-13 second half, 72-36 overall) shut out Bowling Green (19-21, 56-53) for the second time in three games, and outscored the Hot Rods, 15-3, in the three-game series. Quad Cities has its second double-digit win streak of the season, following 12 straight wins April 29-May 11, which was the team's first double-digit winning streak since 2002. This season, the 15 other Midwest League teams have combined for two double-digit win streaks (10 games each by Great Lakes and Kane County).

After allowing a leadoff single in the fourth inning to Hot Rods third baseman Grant Kay, Barrios (1-0) retired the final nine batters he faced and struck out two in the sixth inning to finish his outing. In two starts with Quad Cities, Barrios has pitched 11 shutout innings, allowing three hits and one walk with eight strikeouts. Quad Cities starting pitchers have not allowed a run in the last seven games - a streak of 41 consecutive scoreless innings.

Following Barrios, Ryan Thompson retired all six men he faced, striking out three, in the seventh and eighth innings, and Angel Heredia allowed one hit in a scoreless ninth for his sixth save of the season. The River Bandits' Midwest League-leading 13th shutout is their most since 14 shutouts in 2001.

Muniz got the scoring started in the bottom of the fourth inning on a blast off Hot Rods starter Henry Centeno (6-7) to the top of the Modern Woodmen berm in straight-away left field - his first Midwest League home run of the season in 19 games with Quad Cities - to give the River Bandits the 1-0 lead. Muniz also had a double as part of his fourth multi-hit outing in his last five games.

Despite the 11 hits, Quad Cities only mustered one more run. In the sixth inning, first baseman Ryan Bottger reached on an error by Hot Rods first baseman Coty Blanchard and advanced to second base on a single by catcher Trent Woodward. After third baseman Luis Reynoso struck out, a two-out single by shortstop Kristian Trompiz drove in Bottger, doubling the River Bandits' lead to 2-0. Bottger, Muñiz, Trompiz and center fielder Bobby Boyd each had two hits. Boyd finished 6-for-11 in the series against Bowling Green.

The River Bandits open their final series of their season-long nine-game, 10-day homestand with the first of three games against the Dayton Dragons at 7 p.m. Friday. Right-handers Elieser Hernandez (1-1, 1.96) of Quad Cities and Tyler Mahle (11-5, 2.51) of Dayton are scheduled to pitch the series opener.

UP NEXT: Gates open at 6 p.m. for Autism Awareness Night, when the River Bandits will wear special caps to be auctioned during the game to benefit the Quad Cities Autism Center. The 7 p.m. game is a Fireworks Friday presented by Smart Toyota of Quad Cities, WLLR and WQAD. 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.

## **ValleyCats no-hit IronBirds in 5-0 win!**

By: Tri-City ValleyCats

BERDEEN, MD - Thursday night was special for the Tri-City ValleyCats, and not just because they scored four runs in the top of the first inning, and went on to shut out the Aberdeen IronBirds 5-0. It also wasn't just due to the fact that it was the 'Cats fourth win in the last five games, or that Aaron Mizell went 3-for-5, with two triples.

Overshadowing all those achievements, was the feat accomplished by right-handers Kevin McCanna and Ralph Garza, and left-hander Zac Person, who combined to strike out 12 batters, allow only one walk, and toss the first no-hitter by a Tri-City ValleyCats squad in more than seven years.

Ironically, the 'Cats offense looked like it would be the story early on. Johnny Sewald led off the top of the first with a single, moved to second on a stolen base, advanced to third on a fly-out, then scored on an RBI groundout by Aaron Mizell.

Three batters later, Pat Porter drove home Hector Roa and Dexture McCall with a two-run double to right field, before scoring on an RBI single by Anthony Hermelyn, as Tri-City jumped out to a 4-0 lead before the host IronBirds came to bat.

Sewald then led off the top of the second by reaching on a walk, before stealing second again, and eventually coming home to score on a wild pitch.

That was the last run the 'Cats would score on the night. However, to say the early offensive onslaught was more than enough to support the Tri-City pitching staff would be quite an understatement.

Getting the start for the 'Cats was McCanna, who struck out five batters in four innings, allowing only one walk, while another runner reached on an error. Both the strikeout total, and the four innings pitched, equaled career-highs for the native of The Woodlands, Texas, and 2015 13th round draft pick out of Rice University

He was relieved in the fifth inning by Garza, who struck out seven batters, while allowing no base runners in four frames. Like McCanna, Garza, a New Braunfels, Texas native who was selected this year in the 26th round out of the University of Oklahoma, also equaled career-highs in both strikeouts and innings pitched.

Person, a ninth round selection this season out of Louisiana State University, replaced Garza to pitch the ninth. And just like his two predecessors, Person, a native of Eunice, La., had little trouble with the IronBirds offense, getting Aberdeen second baseman Drew Turbin to fly out to Sewald in center field, designated hitter Cedric Mullins to ground out on a comebacker to the mound, before getting center fielder Glynn Davis to fly out on a 0-1 pitch to Pat Porter in right field, cementing the no-hitter.

The no-no was the first thrown by the Valleycats since Shane Wolf, David Miller, and Ashton Mowdy teamed up to hold the Oneonta Tigers without a hit on June 21, 2008. That game, like Thursday night's contest, also was a road contest for Tri-City.

Earning the victory for the 'Cats was Garza, who not only was a part of a no-hitter, but also registered his first professional win.

Tri-City will return to Ripken Stadium on Friday night, to take on the IronBirds in the second game of this three-game set. Getting the start for the ValleyCats will be RHP Ryan Deemes, with LHP Robert Strader on the mound for Aberdeen.

## **Elias Says...**

By: Elias Sports Bureau / espn.com

**A most unusual day - but another win - for Zack Greinke**

Zack Greinke allowed five runs before he retired a batter in his start on Thursday afternoon, but he gave up only one more run after that and went on to pitch six innings and record a win over the Phillies. Greinke is the first starting pitcher on any major-league team to win a game in which he allowed five or more runs before recording an out since June 25, 1949, when Ralph Branca of the Brooklyn Dodgers did so in a game at Pittsburgh. Branca gave up five runs before the first Pirates batter was retired in the bottom of the first inning that day, but he went on to pitch a complete game in a 17-10 Dodgers victory!

Greinke helped his own cause with a great day at the plate, recording three hits in three at-bats, including a home run, and scoring three runs. He's the first major-league pitcher to hit a home run and rack up at least three hits and three runs scored in the same game since April 28, 2009, when the Cubs' Carlos Zambrano went 3-for-4 with a homer and three runs scored in a win at Arizona. Before Greinke, the only Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher to be that productive on offense in one game was Claude Osteen, who was 4-for-5 with a home run and three runs scored in a 19-3 complete-game win at San Francisco on May 26, 1970.

**Buehrle beats the Twins for the 30th time**

Mark Buehrle registered his 30th career win against the Twins with a victory in Toronto on Thursday. That's the most career wins by any active pitcher versus one major-league team. Buehrle notched his first 27 wins against Minnesota while pitching for the White Sox and the last three for the Blue Jays. In baseball's expansion era (1961 to date), only five other American League pitchers have recorded 30 or more wins against a particular team: Bert Blyleven vs. the Royals (34); Jack Morris (32), Mickey Lolich (30) and Jim Kaat (30) vs. the Indians; and Jim Palmer vs. the Yankees (30).

**Khris clouts two three-run homers**

Khris Davis hit a pair of three-run homers in the Brewers' 10-1 win over the Padres. He hit the first one off San Diego starter Odrisamer Despaigne in the third inning and the second against Kevin Quackenbush in the eighth inning. Davis is the seventh player in Brewers history to hit two home runs with two or more runners on base in one game. The others are Ted Simmons (1982), Rob Deer (1987), B.J. Surhoff (1995), Jose Hernandez (2001), Aramis Ramirez (2013) and Ryan Braun (2014).

**Ellsbury is a beast against the A.L. East**

Jacoby Ellsbury had two hits in the Yankees' 2-1 win over the Red Sox on Thursday and it was his home run which snapped a 1-1 tie in the seventh inning and proved decisive. Ellsbury has recorded 18 multiple-hit games this season and 16 of them have been at the expense of the Yankees' four AL East rivals, the Rays (6), Red Sox (5), Orioles (3) and Blue Jays (2). Ellsbury has a .346 batting average in intradivision games this season and a .167 mark in all other games this year.

**Wacha's win takes the Cardinals to 30 games above break-even**

Michael Wacha recorded his team-leading 13th win of the season with a 3-0 victory at Cincinnati on Thursday which moved the Cardinals' record to 30 games over .500 for the first time this season (69-39). Over the last 70 years the only other seasons in which the Cardinals reached 30 games over .500 this early (based on fewest losses) are 1968 (first at 64-34) and 2004 (66-36).

**Victor Martinez's two-homer game**

Tigers designated hitter Victor Martinez homered twice in Detroit's 8-6 win over the Royals. It was the seventh multiple-homer game of Martinez's major-league career but his first since Sept. 17, 2010, when he hit two home runs for the Red Sox against the Blue Jays at Fenway Park. Martinez has hit 64 career home runs as a designated hitter, but until Thursday he was the only one of the seven active players with at least 50 home runs as a D.H. who had not had a multi-homer game in that role.

**Nats rookie is in control**

Rookie Joe Ross posted his third win for the Nationals with a victory against the Diamondbacks in which he allowed only one run and did not walk a batter. Ross, who made his major-league debut on June 6, has recorded at least seven strikeouts while issuing no more than one walk in each of his three big-league wins. The only other rookie with as many wins of that kind this season as Ross is the Giants' Chris Heston with three.

Markakis' hitting streak reaches a baker's dozen

Nick Markakis drove in three runs in a game for the first time this season to help lead the Braves to a 9-8 win against the Marlins. Markakis recorded one RBI with a sacrifice fly in the first inning and two with a second-inning double, which also extended his hitting streak to 13 games, matching the longest streak this year by a Braves player, a 13-game skein by A.J. Pierzynski. Markakis, who signed with Atlanta last December, had two longer hitting streaks in 2014, his final season with the Orioles (18 and 14 games).

Before Thursday's game, Markakis had not registered more than two RBI in any of his last 183 starts in the third or fourth slots in the batting order. Since 1920, when runs batted in became an official statistic, only four major-league players have had longer streaks of starts as a #3 or #4 hitter without a three-RBI game: Pete O'Brien (282), Roberto Clemente (249), Billy Southworth (199) and Jeff Cirillo (190).

Schwarber socks a three-run homer

Cubs rookie Kyle Schwarber hit a three-run home run in Chicago's 5-4 victory over the Giants at Wrigley Field. Schwarber has hit five home runs and driven in 12 runs in the 19 games he's played since the All-Star break. The only National League rookie with as many homers and RBI since the break as Schwarber is the Cardinals' Randal Grichuk (six home runs, 14 RBI).

## 8.7.15 OPPONENT AT OAKLAND ATHLETICS

### Brooks handcuffs powerful Astros

*Young A's righty allows just one run over seven*

By: Trevor Hass / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Aaron Brooks' dominance in the A's 5-4 loss to the Astros on Thursday was overshadowed by more late-inning bullpen issues, but the young right-hander left with a lead and impressed for the second straight outing.

Brooks pitched seven solid innings, yielding just one run and striking out seven. He has thrown 14 1/3 innings and given up a total of two runs in his two starts with the Athletics.

"Personally, it's nothing that I would change that I could comment on," Brooks said, "other than we lost the game."

A's manager Bob Melvin was impressed once again by Brooks' mix of composure and tenacity.

He flashed composure when his pitch count continued to rise in the seventh, but he ended up retiring the side 1-2-3. He flashed tenacity when he struck out Jason Castro to end that same frame and pounded his fist into his glove in celebration.

Brooks also struck out the side in the fourth and retired 10 in a row in one stretch.

"He pitched great," Melvin said. "That's all you can ask for. It would have been nice to reward him."

Brooks finished with 108 pitches (69 strikes), and Melvin knew Castro would be his last hitter regardless. The right-hander ensured he made it through seven innings, and he was pleased with the way he threw the ball overall.

"I think just being able to throw first-pitch strikes with any pitch was huge," Brooks said. "They're an aggressive team, for them not to be able to sit on any certain pitch definitely helped out."

Saturday, Brooks pitched to keep his spot in the rotation. Thursday, he pitched to cement it.

Brooks was largely a question mark coming over from Kansas City in the Ben Zobrist trade July 28, but he's exceeded expectations.

"It's a great opportunity, something the Royals weren't able to give me right now," Brooks said. "Really thankful that Oakland is real confident [in me] and willing to give me that shot."

## **A's all too familiar with close losses**

*Oakland rallies late, but misses chances to win it*

By: Trevor Hass / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The way Thursday's 5-4, 10-inning loss to the Astros unfolded for the A's was nothing new.

It's been happening all season, and they even lost in a similar fashion the day before.

"We came up a little short," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "We've done that a lot this year."

The A's are 0-54 when trailing after eight, 11-26 in one-run games and have lost 10 of 14 overall.

They nearly beat one of the best teams in baseball, but instead took another tough loss. For the second straight day, the opposing team scored in the top of the 10th and went on to win.

Wednesday, it was Chris Davis, who clobbered a go-ahead grand slam to spark the Orioles. The next day, it was former Athletic Jed Lowrie, who atoned for an error that helped the A's climb back in the ninth with a go-ahead RBI double in the 10th.

"There's positives, but obviously the loss was a negative," Ike Davis said, "but at least we didn't give up."

The A's trailed, 4-2, entering the ninth after a booming go-ahead shot from Astros rookie sensation Carlos Correa, but they didn't fold.

Lowrie's throwing error helped the A's put runners at the corners with no outs, when Davis drove home Stephen Vogt with a single to right-center. Three batters later, Billy Burns beat out a throw at first to avoid a double play, bring home the tying run and keep the game alive.

Coco Crisp was the next batter, and he belted a ball to right that both Melvin and Davis thought had a chance to leave the yard.

"I thought it was a homer for sure," Davis said. "This park is weird sometimes. I thought it was a no-doubt home run."

Even a long single would have given Oakland a walk-off win, but instead the game went to extras and the A's learned their all-too-common fate.

They had their chances, as they have many times this year. They even capitalized on some, but didn't do enough to complete the comeback.

"It's tough," Melvin said. "We've lost many games like this this year. It comes down to a bunch of little things. Coco's ball, we had a good feeling it was at least off the wall, and that's the game right there."

## **Kazmir fondly reflects on A's tenure**

*Houston lefty back in Oakland, but won't face former club*

By: Trevor Hass / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Scott Kazmir doesn't feel like he's been away from the Coliseum for long.

That's partially because seeing old teammates and friends Thursday reminded the Astros left-hander of the fond memories he has from his time in Oakland. It's also because he's only been gone two weeks.

Kazmir, who was traded to Houston on July 23, makes his return to the Coliseum this week as the A's host the Astros in a four-game set. The left-hander pitched Wednesday against the Rangers and won't face the A's in the series, but that's OK with Oakland manager Bob Melvin.

"I'm sure he looks a little different without the white shoes and the green and gold," Melvin said, "but other than when he pitches against us, we wish him the best. He had a big impact on a lot of guys here and is a true pro."

"I like pitching here, but it's good to have these days off," Kazmir said. "It would have been fun facing those guys."



Kazmir made sure to catch up with all his former teammates, particularly the pitchers. He said he still keeps in touch with many of them, notably his good friend and mentee Sonny Gray.

"It's not like I'm going to say, 'Hey, let's talk about your pitching or whatever,'" Kazmir said. "It's just having that veteran presence where any of the young guys can lean on you for advice or any type of questions that they have."

Though Kazmir said he cherishes the time he had in Oakland, he's quickly acclimated to life in Houston. Kazmir snatched American League Pitcher of the Month honors in July and has only given up one earned run in 20 1/3 innings in three starts with the Astros.

He's loved competing in a pennant race with a club that not many expected to contend at the start of the season. He admits he misses the extra foul ground in Oakland, but he likes pitching in Houston, too.

Kazmir's also enjoyed playing back home. He lives about 40 minutes from Minute Maid Park, but, as he put it, "it's worth the drive."

"It's a little weird, seeing friends and family and being able to sleep in my own bed during the season," he said, smiling, "but I can definitely get used to it."