

ASTROS DAILY CLIPS

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Astros acquire P Oliver Perez from Diamondbacks

By: Evan Drellich / Houston Chronicle

The Astros didn't go long without a second lefthanded reliever.

The non-waiver trade deadline has passed but deals can still be made with players who are placed on waivers and the Astros struck one such deal Friday night, agreeing to acquire veteran lefty Oliver Perez from the Diamondbacks in exchange for teenage lefty Junior Garcia from Class A short season Tri-City.

Perez is to report to the Astros on Sunday in Oakland.

Sam Deduno, who's out for the season after hip surgery, went to the 60-day disabled list to make room on the 40-man roster. A corresponding 25-man roster move has not been announced.

Joe Thatcher's departure left Tony Sipp as the only lefty in the Astros 'pen. Perez, who turns 34 next week, fills that void.

A fastball-slider pitcher primarily, Perez is in his 13th season and has been very effective in the second phase of his career, as a starter turned reliever.

Perez has held lefthanded hitters this season to a .183 average and .234 on-base percentage in 64 plate appearances, with 22 strikeouts and 3 walks. He has a 3.10 ERA in 29 innings.

He's faced righthanded batters the same number of times this season, 64, but hasn't fared as well. They have a .269 average and .397 OBP against him.

Presumably, the Astros will use Perez more as a situational lefty.

Garcia, a 19-year-old from the Dominican Republic, did very well between Rookie ball and short-season play. In 37 1/3 innings, he had a 0.96 ERA with 26 strikeouts.

Thatcher was designated for assignment on July 21. He re-signed with the team on a minor league deal.

Astros' offense comes up short, fall to Athletics 3-1

By: Evan Drellich / Houston Chronicle

OAKLAND, Calif. — The harder contact seemed to come against Sonny Gray in the duel of aces and potential Cy Young winners at O.co Coliseum, when the A's righty squared off with Astros lefty Dallas Keuchel on Friday night in a breezy two hours, 20 minutes. The trouble with the sport most defined by failure and random outcomes is that the team that squares up the ball the most often doesn't always win. Plus, that Gray kid is really darn good.

Luis Valbuena's team-leading 21st home run Friday in the fifth inning was the Astros' only scoring in a 3-1 loss to the A's, the Astros fourth loss in their last five games. The teams have split the first two games of four.

Gray, 25, went complete, striking out five and allowing five hits. He's allowed just four earned runs in his last 32 innings, a 1.13 ERA.

"Typical Sonny," Keuchel said.

"He pitched very efficient," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "You know he's got really good stuff. I'm not sure we saw his best overall breaking ball command which is impressive when he can continue to get outs with moving his fastball around and his cutter and his changeup. He mixed his pitches well and he shows why he's one of the best in the league."

The top three pitchers in ERA in the American League were in the building for Friday's game: Scott Kazmir, who isn't pitching in this series against his former team, was the leader at 2.08 to start the day. Gray was at 2.12 and Keuchel at 2.35.

Gray took back the top spot with his nine innings, dropping his ERA to 2.06. Keuchel, meanwhile, saw his still excellent mark rise slightly, to 2.40, with 7 2/3 innings of three-run ball.

The Astros lefty matched his season-high with 10 hits, the second time this season — and the second time in the last three outings — the opposition's reached that number.

The very first batter Keuchel faced, Billy Burns, hit an infield single that was deflected by the pitcher, a tone setter if there ever was one.

Another ball deflected by Keuchel in the second inning loaded the bases with none out, the third of three straight ground-ball singles, setting up a jam that Keuchel sufficiently stifled. Only one run came home, on a Burns sac fly.

The A's added another run for a 2-0 lead in the third on Danny Valencia's homer to left center.

"It was middle third coming back in, it was a two-seam (fastball)," Keuchel said. "He likes the ball away from him and I still don't think he got all of it, but he's a strong guy. He's had some success against me."

"I thought they were taking some good pitches early, forcing me into hitters' counts. Even though they didn't really hit the ball extremely hard off me, it was some good luck for them. But I can't put myself in hitters' counts consistently early on. ... Sonny had pitched a heck of a game tonight."

For the Astros, as has been the case more often than not on the road trip, the big hits were scarce, although facing Gray deserves a mulligan. Valbuena was the only one with multiple hits.

The homer he hit in the fifth on a full-count fastball cut the lead to 2-1 but the deficit grew back to two runs in the bottom of the inning on Josh Phegley's two-out ground-rule double.

"I think we all kind of figured we had to do," Phegley said. "I think that was the third time I've faced him this year, and I'm mainly a pull guy. You could tell by the way they were playing me, and it just hasn't worked against him."

"He's a good sinkerballer, keeps the ball down and I've pounded seven at-bats to shortstop, so I was like, 'I'm just going to shoot that hole they have for me over there,' and it worked out for us."

Colby Rasmus, playing right field Friday, saved a run with a beautiful throw to home one batter later, cutting down Phegley as he tried to score from second on a Marcus Semien single.

Keuchel's gone at least six innings in 34 consecutive outings, the longest active streak in the majors and a club record.

Management of the Houston Astros' roster is key this time of year

By: Evan Drellich / Houston Chronicle

OAKLAND, Calif. — The light at the end of the tunnel for any contending team, and its front office, is September's roster expansion. Anyone on the 40-man roster is available for the final month of the season, easing bullpen woes and making questions of 12- or 13-man pitching staffs irrelevant.

The key is first navigating August, ensuring that every single day while the rosters remain limited to only 25 players — the maximum from opening day until the final day of August, doubleheaders aside — that those 25 spaces are used as effectively as possible.

"We need to make sure that every one of those spots has the best possible player for what we want to do," general manager Jeff Luhnow said on July 31, in the context of a question about designating long man Roberto Hernandez for assignment.

That's a relatively new way of thinking for the Astros, even within this season. They arguably didn't act with that reasoning when they waited to promote Carlos Correa until June, but after the trades the team has made, with first place still theirs and theirs alone — contention is very real now.

The roster design has to reflect that, too.

"As these games get a little bit heightened awareness and the attention gets maximized, roster usage is very key in getting us to the finish line," manager A.J. Hinch said Friday. "I want to use our roster the best way I can. ... I work every day trying to figure out the best nine to start and how I'm going to use our bench to squeeze out the most advantages that we can."

For most of the year, the Astros carried 13 pitchers. The extra pitcher, the eighth in the bullpen, is most useful on the days a starter exits early. The last man in the bullpen is insurance, essentially, and prevents a 'pen hangover for the following days without needing a roster move — something the Astros couldn't avoid with a 12-man staff when they were swept by the Rangers earlier this week.

With just 12 pitchers, more regular relievers typically have to be burnt through in a game that might be well out of hand. Part of what has made this group of Astros relievers successful is its usage, and an extra man contributes to that.

The merits of the final spot on the roster going to a position player or pitcher can be debated both ways.

"Our best team has some pretty defined roles, so I think as we get into the rotation — now we've made it a declaration we have five starters instead of six," Hinch said. "That's going to change eventually. It's going to create some logjam problems to where we may have to mix and match who's there."

"To me it's going to be based on need more than anything. If we can avoid some of the blow-up games where your bullpen's being overly taxed and you need an extra arm, or if we can stay healthy and we don't need a fill-in without (a trip to the disabled list to free a roster spot for that fill-in), that'll be key. But there's no doubt: September comes and we get the onslaught of talent that we've kind of filtered through here throughout the year, that's when we'll have our best team and most available team."

In the mean time, there's question marks. Chris Carter is an easy one to pick out. He hasn't started a game since Sunday, but will start on Saturday, Hinch said. Carlos Gomez's arrival tightened an already tight starting lineup.

“(Carter) is going to have to fight for his playing time a little bit, and obviously as our lineup’s gotten deeper and some of the options have multiplied, playing time can be hard to come by,” Hinch said.

Is Carter as pinch hitter the most effective use of roster space? Do the 13 position players and 12 pitchers as currently lined up represent, as Luhnow put it, the best possible players?

George Springer is due back soon from the disabled list. Vince Velasquez and Lance McCullers are to return from the minors at some point as well. But every day before their returns matter.

Righty Roberto Hernandez’s time with the Astros is definitively over after he was designated for assignment. He’s seeking a major league deal somewhere.

Pitcher Sam Deduno recently underwent season-ending surgery to repair the labrum in his right hip, as planned. He and Brad Peacock both lost the bulk of their years to injuries.

It’s unclear if Mark Appel will figure into the Astros plans down the stretch. “I don’t know. We’ll see,” manager A.J. Hinch said. “We haven’t begun those conversations too much about September.”

Scott Kazmir and Scott Feldman are the scheduled starting pitchers for the two-game series against the Giants on Tuesday and Wednesday in San Francisco.

Evan Gattis’ adaption to designated hitting role

By: Evan Drellich / Houston Chronicle

OAKLAND, Calif. — Astros designated hitter Evan Gattis is always buzzing or moving somewhere, rarely sitting at his locker with a crossword puzzle or lounging on the couch playing a game on his phone. The burly, bearded slugger is built for anything but idling.

The switch to designated hitter, then, might be counterintuitive for Gattis, who turns 29 this month and was a catcher before this year. There’s a lot of time in-between at-bats, with no defensive duties to serve as a distraction.

“He chats me up every day,” manager A.J. Hinch said. “There’s always a spot right next to me that a lot of players come by and stand with me for a little bit (during the games). He’s one of the ones that does it the most. He’s a bright guy, bright baseball mind. He’s always thinking.”

One of Gattis’ recurring thoughts: he misses catching, and he doesn’t miss catching at all.

“I love catching, but I didn’t realize how hard it was until I’m not catching,” Gattis said on a recent road trip. “It’s really hard. It’s a hard job. It’s unbelievable. I always knew it was hard. Just the way I feel right now compared to last year, just have even more respect.”

Gattis said he feels awesome physically, a night-and-day difference. He’s had knee and back problems in the past, but hasn’t seen the disabled list this year.

That’s exactly why he can be hard to find around the clubhouse before games.

When Gattis gets to the ball park, he’ll usually get something to eat first. Then he might read the paper before going in for treatment on any nagging physical condition.

Not everyone is so proactive in seeking the medical and training staff’s attention. But Gattis is particularly in tune to his corporal needs, and acknowledged he takes a lot of treatment.

“Hot tub, cold tub, stuff like that. I get loose, do some ... thoracic spine mobility, just stretching and stuff like that and foam rolling,” Gattis said, talking about a common stretch where he’ll sit on the floor and roll over with a tube of foam under his back. “I always err on the side of caution, just because last year kind of made me do that catching. ... Cold tub after the game, contrast before, no matter what. And ice. And just preventative stuff.

“I don’t know how much I need it, but it doesn’t hurt, you know what I’m saying? Your paycheck is your body, you might as well take care of it as best you can. (Treatments are) at our disposal. ... If I have something I would rather go in than not.”

Gattis has purposely lost weight, dropping about eight pounds since spring training so he can become lighter and faster, and it’s visible. (He also, comically and impressively, has seven triples.)

The pre-game preparation for Gattis, who was with the Braves before they traded him to the Astros in the winter, was time-consuming in a different way when he was a catcher. He would spend about an hour reviewing the other team’s lineup once he had it in his hands. That became his No. 1 priority — so by default, his body was not his first focus.

Before batting practice on the field, Gattis hits off the tee most every day, and that’s a new habit. He learned it from one of the best, Lance Berkman, in spring training.

Gattis is a major leaguer, but until he worked with Berkman in Florida, he actually felt he didn’t know how to properly utilize the most basic of hitting tools around.

"It's just more about like bat path," Gattis said. "I'll move the tee around and really work on ... changing posture, stuff like that, and then I'm ready to go for BP."

"I just never knew how to use the Tee. I never really liked it, and in spring training, I started hitting good. ... I asked (Berkman) to show me. 'Cause he was big on it, and I had a ton of respect for Berkman, who's an unbelievable hitter."

The big man who's becoming a little less of a big man goes for a super-food smoothie after his hacks are done: spinach, fruit. Then there could be an advance meeting ahead of the game. About 30 minutes before first pitch, he'll start getting ready to go out to the field.

The very start of the season was tough for Gattis. But Dating to April 26 through play Thursday, he hit .261 with 16 home runs and a .483 slugging percentage.

"DH is, like, unbelievably different," he said.

Keuchel solid, but road woes continue

Left-hander struggles during early innings in tough loss to A's

By: Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Astros pitcher Dallas Keuchel, a Gold Glove winner who is among the best in the game at inducing ground balls, was left with little margin for error on Friday night against Oakland's Sonny Gray, so when he wasn't able to make some plays on the infield it spelled trouble.

Keuchel didn't pitch poorly, but was outdueled by Gray, who threw a complete game without issuing a walk in the A's' 3-1 win over the Astros. Keuchel went 7 2/3 innings and allowed three runs and 10 hits -- eight singles -- to fall to 3-6 on the road this year.

"It was one of those days I'd like to have a few plays back," Keuchel said. "I botched about three balls I usually make and that was the difference. Early on, I fought well, but just wasn't making quality pitches in hitters' counts and on the road with a quality opponent, even though they're not playing ball like they would like to, I can't afford to do that. And it cost me."

Keuchel (13-6) allowed the leadoff hitter to reach in four of his first five innings, including a homer off the bat of Danny Valencia in the third to make it 2-0. One play Keuchel wasn't able to make was a second-inning chopper off the bat of Mark Canha that allowed the A's to load the bases for Billy Burns, who delivered a sac fly.

"That's something I'm normally sure-handed at," Keuchel said. "That's what I'm most disappointed at myself. It was nobody else's fault. I just wasn't very good early."

The early traffic ran Keuchel's pitch count up to 59 pitches through three innings, but he threw only 42 over the next four innings.

"I thought they were taking some good pitches early and forcing me into hitters' counts," Keuchel said. "Even though they didn't really hit the ball extremely hard off me, but it was good luck for them. I can't find myself in hitters' counts consistently early on. I need to find my groove, but Sonny had pitched a heck of a game."

Keuchel was pulled after giving up a two-out single in the eighth, just one out shy of what would have been a complete game in a loss.

"All in all, Dallas puts us in position to have a chance," manager A.J. Hinch said. "Tonight wasn't a night where we had much room for error."

Astros acquire left-hander Perez from D-backs

By: Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The Astros have landed veteran left-handed pitcher Oliver Perez in a trade with the Arizona Diamondbacks.

The Astros are sending Tri-City left-handed pitcher Junior Garcia, 19, to Arizona in the deal. Perez, a 33-year-old who would give the Astros some bullpen depth, will report on Sunday. Samuel Deduno, who underwent hip surgery on Friday, was transferred to the 60-day DL. Tony Sipp is currently the only lefty in the bullpen.

Perez has posted a 3.10 ERA in 48 games for Arizona this year with 37 strikeouts in 29 innings. A veteran of 13 Major League seasons, Perez is 67-80 with a 4.42 ERA in 417 career appearances, including 195 starts. He's a free agent at season's end.

The Astros began the year with Sipp and Joe Thatcher as lefties in the bullpen, but Thatcher was designated for assignment July 21 and recently re-signed to a contract and assigned to Triple-A Fresno. Kevin Chapman, who appeared in three games for the Astros earlier this year, is another lefty in Fresno.

Astros' bats shut down by A's Gray

By: Trevor Hass and Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Sonny Gray tossed a complete game, out-pitching Dallas Keuchel and helping the A's beat the Astros, 3-1, at the Coliseum on Friday night.

Gray and Keuchel came in with similar resumes, but Gray yielded just one run while Keuchel allowed three runs over 7 2/3 innings.

"I don't think it matters who he goes against," A's catcher Josh Phegley said. "He's just out to prove he's one of the best pitchers in the American League."

Danny Valencia homered in the third for the A's, his first with the club. Billy Burns hit a sacrifice fly that scored Phegley in the second, and Phegley plated Brett Lawrie with a ground-rule double in the fifth.

The Astros hit the ball hard against Gray early in the game and couldn't find any holes, while Keuchel was hampered by some soft contact in the infield, though he did give up a homer to Valencia to lead off the third.

"They had traffic on the base the whole time," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "They put a lot of pressure on him to have to make pitches with guys on base. The three hits in a row, I think only one left the infield -- the hit by pitch, the home run. They found a way to get on base in different ways and that proved to be a lot of traffic for Dallas to have to deal with."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Gray-t once again: Gray gave up five hits and struck out five in the win, recording his third complete game in his last six starts. The right-hander has now yielded a total of four runs in his last four starts (31 innings) and helped his cause for the American League Cy Young Award.

"I just challenged them a lot with my fastball," Gray said. "It wasn't the best that it's been. Slider wasn't the best that it's been, but like I said, trying to make them put ball in play as quick as possible and as early in the count as possible. We were just fortunate enough to have it go our way tonight."

Misplays cost Keuchel: Keuchel allowed the leadoff hitter to reach in four of his first five innings, and three times they came around to score, and he lamented plays that he wasn't able to make on the infield. He threw 7 2/3 innings to extend his club record by working at least six innings for the 34th start in a row, but fell to 3-6 with a 2.45 ERA on the road this season.

"I thought they were taking some good pitches early and forcing me into hitters' counts," Keuchel said. "Even though they didn't really hit the ball extremely hard off me, but it was good luck for them. I can't get myself in hitters' counts consistently early on. I need to find my groove, but Sonny had pitched a heck of a game."

Welcome to Oakland: Valencia, in his second game with the A's, reached base three times. He walked in the first, hit the solo shot in the third and singled in the fifth. He also made a terrific running catch in foul ground in the seventh inning. [More >](#)

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Billy Burns recorded his 100th hit on Friday. He signed the ball for his sister, Abbey, and gave it to her after the game.

WHAT'S NEXT

Astros: Collin McHugh (13-5, 4.27 ERA) will try to win his fifth consecutive start when he gets the ball for the Astros in Saturday's 3:05 p.m. CT game at the Coliseum. McHugh has gone 4-0 with a 3.24 ERA in his past four starts.

A's: Jesse Chavez (5-11, 3.88) is on the mound for Saturday's game at 1:05 p.m. PT, looking to bounce back after yielding six earned runs in 3 2/3 innings in his last start. The right-hander is 1-5 with a 6.23 ERA and .322 opponents' batting average over his last seven outings.

Among young stars, Tucker makes impression

Rookie outfielder shows he can produce in big leagues

By: Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Led by incredible Carlos Correa, the Astros' rookie class has been one of the best in club history. Correa is one of the favorites for American League Rookie of the Year, right-hander Lance McCullers Jr. has been terrific, with the exception of one start, and outfielder Preston Tucker is starting for a team in the playoff hunt.

Tucker's rookie numbers have been overshadowed by Correa's greatness, but the 25-year-old has been a key part of Houston's success this year. Called up in May, Tucker entered Friday hitting .265 with 10 homers and 28 RBIs, ranking second among all AL rookies in extra-base hits (27) and doubles (17) and third in homers (10).

"In Spring Training, I didn't know what to expect," said Tucker, a seventh-round draft pick in 2012 out of Florida. "I wanted to make it to the big leagues at some point in the year and help contribute, but I didn't know what role or how long I could be up here for. I'm playing a majority of the time and it's awesome seeing the kind of lineup we have and knowing that I can mix in there and potentially help us out is big."

Tucker set collegiate records at Florida for hits, doubles and RBIs, but he's got some power as well. He has 57 homers in 294 career Minor League games and this year he is one of eight Astros players to hit double-digit homers. So what separates Tucker and his success from other players who put up huge Minor League numbers but can't replicate those at the Major League level?

"A lot of it is just consistency and swing mechanics," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "When you get up here, you're going to face some of the most quality pitching day in and day out that you've ever faced. Every night the other team is throwing somebody out there that's pretty difficult."

"I think a player with a simplified approach, a guy like Tucker that isn't overly complicated in his approach or how hitting mechanics are, can adjust to the league maybe a little faster than someone who has some timing mechanisms or some more unique traits about their swing. You never know how a guy is going to adjust to the third deck and the names on the backs of the jerseys can be intimidating for young hitters."

Tucker said some players at Triple-A feast on pitchers who haven't yet figured out their command or don't have good secondary stuff, but can't hit good pitching. Tucker says when he's swing is right, he feels he can hit anyone.

"And if I'm not playing well, I can't really hit anybody," he said. "So I feel like it's just kind of an approach thing. I feel like if I stick to my approach and stay confident, I'll be able to hang with the best of them."

McHugh eyes win No. 14 in contest vs. A's

By: Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

The A's will face their second consecutive 13-game winner when Astros right-hander Collin McHugh takes the mound for Saturday's game at the Coliseum.

McHugh (13-5, 4.27 ERA) has won his last four starts, going 4-0 with a 3.24 ERA. He's done that despite allowing 33 hits -- and striking out 17 batters -- in 25 innings during that stretch, including two seven-inning outings.

Right-hander Jesse Chavez (5-11, 3.88 ERA) will start for the A's. He's struggled since the All-Star break, going 1-2 with a 6.62 ERA with a .338 opponents' batting average in four starts. This will be his fifth career start against Houston.

Things to know about this game:

- Chris Carter, whose playing time has been dramatically reduced since the team acquired Carlos Gomez in a trade and shortstop Jed Lowrie returned from his injury, will start Saturday's game, manager A.J. Hinch said. Carter has only one at-bat in the previous four games.
- Chavez leads the American League in losses in day games with six.
- Astros second baseman Jose Altuve entered Friday on a 17-game hitting streak at the Coliseum, batting .382 (29-for-76) with 11 runs scored in that span.

Astros bolster bullpen with acquisition of Oliver Perez

By: Associated Press / espn.com

PHOENIX -- The Houston Astros added help in the bullpen Friday night, acquiring lefty reliever Oliver Perez from the Arizona Diamondbacks for a minor league pitcher.

The trade was announced following Arizona's 2-0 victory over the Cincinnati Reds. Perez joins a surprising Houston team that has a 1 1/2-game lead in the American League West and is trying to hold off the second-place Los Angeles Angels.

"They're in a good spot right now," Perez said. "I would love to help wherever they need."

Perez, 33, is 2-1 with a 3.10 ERA in 48 appearances this season. He leaves Arizona with a 19-game scoreless streak, tied for the third-longest in Diamondbacks history.

Oliver Perez, 33, is 2-1 with a 3.10 ERA in 48 appearances this season. He leaves Arizona with a 19-game scoreless streak, tied for the third-longest in Diamondbacks history. Rick Scuteri/USA TODAY Sports

Perez said goodbye to teammates and Diamondbacks staff in the clubhouse late Friday. He can become a free agent after the season and didn't rule out a return to Arizona, where he has a home.

"I know this team is going to be in the playoffs," said Perez, who set a club record for strikeouts by a left-handed reliever with 76 last year.

Arizona gets 19-year-old lefty Junior Garcia in the deal and will call up another left-hander, Keith Hessler, from Triple-A Reno to fill Perez's spot in the bullpen.

Garcia is 3-1 with a 0.96 ERA and 26 strikeouts in a combined nine games (six starts) between Class A Tri-City and rookie-level Greeneville.

The swap came a week after baseball's deadline for trading players without placing them on waivers.

"I was taken by surprise," Perez said. "Sometimes you feel nervous because, you know, you're going to go to a new organization."

Perez said he found out he'd been dealt right after Friday's game ended.

"It's a really good organization, and I know they're going the right way," Perez said of the Diamondbacks. "I'm just thankful for all the opportunity they gave me."

Gray throws complete game in A's 3-1 win

By: Associated Press / espn.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Some of the Oakland Athletics were considering a pool on how long Friday night's game with the Houston Astros would take.

"I had right around two hours," A's catcher Josh Phegley said after Oakland, behind a complete game effort from Sonny Gray, beat the Astros 3-1 on Friday night. "Both guys pound the strike zone and challenge everybody. I thought there would be a lot of quick at-bats."

Phegley, who had two hits and drove in a run, proved to be a pretty good oddsmaker. There was very little wasted effort from either side as Gray (12-4) got the upper hand of Dallas Keuchel in a game that lasted 2 hours, 20 minutes.

"They're aggressive and they hit a lot of balls hard," Gray said. "They were taking some pretty big swings and we were a little fortunate that they hit them to guys. I wanted to challenge them with my fastball and make them put the ball in play as quick as possible. Guys made some good plays behind me."

Gray improved to 5-1 over his last 11 starts by giving up one run and five hits. He struck out five and did not walk a batter in his third complete game, all within his last six starts. He won at home for the first time since beating the New York Yankees on May 29. He was 0-2 in his previous five home starts.

"It's the same every time. He's pretty consistent," Phegley said. "He uses his fastball to challenge every hitter and keeps them off balance with his slider. He's out to prove he's one of the best pitchers in the American League and he does it time and time again. He keeps an even keel."

Danny Valencia, claimed off waivers from the Toronto Blue Jays on Monday, hit his first home run with the A's and improved to 7 for 12, including two homers and two doubles, against Keuchel.

"We heard he had good numbers against him," Phegley said. "He showed it tonight."

Billy Burns had two hits and drove in a run and Marcus Semien had three hits as the A's improved to 4-3 over their past seven games.

Luis Valbuena hit his 21st home run for the Astros, who have lost four of five.

Keuchel (13-6) gave up three runs and 10 hits in 7 2/3 innings. He walked two and struck out three. The Astros had beaten Oakland the previous six times Keuchel started.

"We knew going into the game that this was going to be a pretty difficult task on both sides," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "They found some hits, they found some holes. I thought Dallas did a good job of holding them down a little bit."

The A's took a 1-0 lead in the second. Phegley, Semien and Mark Canha singled to load the bases. After Keuchel struck out Sam Fuld, Burns hit a sacrifice fly.

It was 2-0 when Valbuena crushed a 3-2 pitch over the fence in right field to close the gap. Phegley doubled home Brett Lawrie, who had been hit by a pitch, in the fifth for the final margin.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Astros: OF Preston Tucker (right arm contusion) was in the starting lineup Friday night after missing two games.

Athletics: OF Josh Reddick, nursing a sore back, was out of the starting lineup Friday night against Keuchel. Reddick is 1 for 15 lifetime against Keuchel. ... The A's acquired minor-league RHP Darwin Frias from the New York Mets on Friday as the player to be named in the Aug. 4 trade of LHP Eric O'Flaherty. Frias, 23 was assigned to Class-A Vermont.

UP NEXT:

Astros: RHP Collin McHugh (13-5, 4.27) has won four straight decisions. He's 2-0 against the A's with a 1.26 ERA. McHugh has recorded 18 strikeouts in 14 1/3 innings against Oakland.

Athletics: RHP Jesse Chavez (5-11, 3.88) is 1-2 with a 6.62 ERA in four starts since the All-Star break. He's 2-1 with a 3.16 ERA in 20 appearances, including four starts, against the Astros.

Grizzlies win their seventh straight with shutout of Sacramento

Fresno's 66 wins through their first 113 games are the most in franchise history

By: Fresno Grizzlies

FRESNO, Calif. - The first-place Fresno Grizzlies (66-47) won their seventh in a row by blanking the Sacramento River Cats (52-62) 2-0 on Friday night in front of 9,449 at Chukchansi Park. Brett Oberholtzer, Tyson Perez and Jason Stoffel combined for the Grizzlies fifth shutout of the season and second this homestand. The effort pushed the club to a season-high 19 games over the .500 mark with 30 games left in the regular season. The 66 wins through the first 113 games of the season are the most for the Grizzlies in franchise history.

The game was scoreless until the bottom of the sixth when Tyler White smacked a two-run homer (4) to left that traveled 413 feet onto the Luftenburgs building. Singleton had doubled into the right field corner one at bat prior to hand the Grizzlies only their third hit of the night and first extra-base hit.

Oberholtzer turned in his second scoreless start of the season as he pitched into the seventh inning. Sacramento never really threatened until the seventh when Kevin Frandsen and Trevor Brown reached on back-to-back singles. Nearing 100 pitches, Oberholtzer struck out Hicks before turning over the game to Tyson Perez, who induced an inning-ending double play on the first batter he faced. Perez would gather another double play in the eighth and end the frame by getting Juan Perez to chase a high strike three.

Jason Stoffel worked through a quick 1-2-3 ninth to pick up his third save of the season. The bullpen is 3-0 with a 3.43 ERA (8 ER/21.0 IP) and three saves through the first seven games of the homestand after posting a gnarly 8.19 mark (27 ER/29.2 IP) during the season-long 11-game road trip (July 20-31).

Oberholtzer is now 2-0 with a 0.63 ERA (1 ER/14.1 IP) and 11 strikeouts during the current homestand and improves to 4-1 with a 1.48 mark (5 ER/30.1 IP) over five home starts.

Andrew Aplin picked up two hits and has now reached base safely in his last nine games, batting .448 (13-29) over that stretch.

The Grizzlies will look to continue their season-high win streak when they play Sacramento in game four of the five-game set at Chukchansi Park on Saturday night. The club will be putting on a Beers of the World promotion, presented by Heineken USA, featuring Strongbow Cider, Newcastle Viking, Dos Equis Amber, and Heineken. Each beer will be available in 16-ounce cups for \$8.50, with sample four-ounce sizes available at \$2.00. Gates to the park open at 6:05 PM, with first pitch set for 7:05 and featuring RHP Tommy Hanson (SAC) vs. RHP Mike Hauschild (FRE).

Kemmer Caps Wild Finish

Hooks Bullpen Makes Statement

By: Corpus Christi Hooks

CORPUS CHRISTI - Corpus Christi right fielder Jon Kemmer reached base five times Friday night, so it was fitting that his last plate appearance resulted in victory.

Midland first baseman Anthony Aliotti committed an error on Kemmer's ninth-inning bouncer, enabling Colin Moran to score from second for 5-4 walk-off win at Whataburger Field before 6,243.

Seth Frankoff (0-1), on to work the ninth for Midland (27-15; 62-50), gave up Teoscar Hernandez's one-out single to deep short. After Hernandez executed a delayed steal of second, Frankoff walked Moran. A.J. Reed singled to left, and Hernandez was thrown out at the plate by Josh Whitaker. Then came Kemmer, who struck the first pitch he saw.

That made a winner of Jandel Gustave (5-1), who capped a shutdown performance by the Corpus Christi bullpen over the final 5 2/3 innings. Gustave touched 101 mph during a two-inning, two-hit, two strikeout stint. Juan Minaya (2 2/3) and Chris Cotton (1) preceded the Hooks closer, who has 13 saves.

Whitaker's ninth homer was a shot into the Corpus Christi bullpen off Edison Frias for a 1-0 second-inning Midland lead.

A.J. Reed answered, parking Parker Frazier's first pitch of the Hooks second over the visiting bullpen in right field.

Frias was chased during a three-run, five-hit fourth, keyed by Bruce Maxwell's two-run double to left-center field. Colin Walsh had a run-scoring infield single, and after Chad Pinder singled to load the bases, Frias exited his Whataburger Field debut in favor of Minaya. Minaya snuffed the RockHound rally by whiffing Matt Olson and getting Ryon Healy to fly out.

Frias surrendered nine hits, walked two, and struck out five over 3 1/3 innings and 79 pitches (49).

Frazier threw four blanks at Corpus Christi (24-18; 72-40) before coming undone in the seventh. He hit Kemmer to begin the frame, and then permitted consecutive doubles by Jio Mier and Conrad Gregor, the latter of which scored two. Danry Vasquez provided the game-tying safety, lashing a single into right field.

Frazier logged four runs, six hits, two walks, and five strikeouts. He threw 95 pitches (55).

Tucker Healy successfully navigated a tricky eighth for the RockHounds by pitching around two walks and a single as Corpus Christi left the bases full.

Kemmer extended his hitting streak to seven. Pinder owns an 11-gamer. Walsh finished with four hits, Reed 3.

The Hooks send lefty Brian Holmes (5-5) against Jake Sanchez (9-7) Saturday at 7:05. The first 2,000 fans take home a Hooks/Whataburger cap as the famous purveyor of hamburgers and other great food celebrates its 65th birthday. Whataburger was founded here in 1950.

CPL Retail Energy presents Rotel and the Hot Tomatoes in concert postgame.

Three homers help power JetHawks win

Davis homers in fourth straight to tie for active club lead

By: Spenser Smith / Lancaster JetHawks

LANCASTER, Calif. - The JetHawks used a total of 16 hits, including three home runs, to build an early lead before staving off late trouble for an 8-5 win over the High Desert Mavericks on Friday night at The Hangar.

Chase McDonald, J.D. Davis and Alex Bregman each homered for the JetHawks (56-55). Davis' home run gave him a homer in his fourth straight game, and Bregman's was his first for Lancaster. James Ramsay went 3-for-5 to extend his hitting streak to 14 games.

Akeem Bostick (3-4) carried a quality start through seven innings before the Mavericks (58-50) scored their fourth run of the game on three consecutive hits in the eighth. The right-hander was charged with five runs over seven innings, striking out seven and walking one.

High Desert opened the scoring in the first inning on a Royce Bolinger sacrifice fly, but Lancaster took the lead in the bottom half on a Ronnie Mitchell two-run single. Ramsay added a RBI-single in the second, and after the Mavericks plated a run in the top of the third, McDonald hit his 20th home run of the season in the home half. Davis would add a two-run shot in the fourth off Richelson Pena (9-7), and a Mott Hyde RBI-single in the fifth extended the JetHawks' lead to 7-2.

Pena was charged with the loss after giving up six runs on 11 hits through just four innings of work for High Desert.

Alberto Triunfel homered to lead off the seventh inning for the Mavericks, and Bostick allowed three hits to open the eighth, including a Bolinger RBI-double. Albert Minnis entered in relief and yielded a RBI-single to Ronald Guzman, cutting the JetHawks' lead to two.

But Bregman homered in the bottom of the eighth to extend Lancaster's lead to three runs, and Minnis tossed a scoreless ninth inning to complete the JetHawks' second straight win.

The series continues on Saturday with first pitch scheduled for 6 p.m. Lancaster will send Bryan Radziewski (3-4, 3.44) to the mound, and Reed Garrett (4-3, 5.61) will start for High Desert. The first 1,000 fans in attendance will receive a JetHawks-themed backpack, courtesy of Child Care Resource Center.

Bandits exploit Dragons for 11th straight win

Quad Cities takes advantage of 5 Dayton errors to roll to 7-1 win in series opener

By: Jess Knaster / Quad Cities River Bandits

Quad Cities River Bandits center fielder Bobby Boyd was 3-for-4 with a double and a run, and River Bandits pitchers combined to allow hold the Dayton Dragons scoreless after a first-inning run in a 7-1 victory and Quad Cities' 11th straight win in front of 5,003 at Modern Woodmen Park Friday night.

Capitalizing on five Dayton errors to score five unearned runs, the River Bandits (28-13 second half, 73-36) extended their current winning streak to within one of matching their season high of 12 straight wins they posted April 29-May 11. Quad Cities also won its ninth straight home game, although when Dayton scored in the first inning Friday, the River Bandits trailed at home game for the first time since July 18.

Dayton (18-23, 57-54) began the first inning with back-to-back baserunners, as shortstop Cory Thompson was hit by a pitch and second baseman Shed Long singled to center field, advancing Thompson to third base. River Bandits starting pitcher Elieser Hernandez (2-1) got first baseman Paul Kronenfeld to ground out to third, which sent Long to second base. With right fielder Aristides Aquino batting, Hernandez threw a wild pitch allowing Thompson to score for the Dragons. The run was the first allowed in the last 41 1/3 innings by a Quad Cities starting pitcher since Beloit scored twice against Justin Ferrell in the fifth inning July 29.

Hernandez responded by retiring 11 batters in order and going on to pitch five innings, allowing three hits and no walks with five strikeouts. Right-hander Brandon McNitt pitched three shutout innings, and right-hander Jorge Perez pitched a scoreless final frame.

Quad Cities went in order in the first two innings without hitting the ball out of the infield against Dayton starter Tyler Mahle (11-6). However, in the third inning, second baseman Jose Fernandez hit a ground ball that was dropped by Thompson at shortstop, giving Quad Cities its first base runner. The River Bandits wasted no time taking the lead on a first-pitch double by catcher Garrett Stubbs and a first-pitch, two-run single by shortstop Kristian Trompiz, putting Quad Cities ahead, 2-1.

The third-inning rally continued with left fielder Jason Martin's single to right field, where Aquino misplayed the ball, allowing Trompiz to score and Martin to advance to second base on the second Dragons error of the inning. Boyd then collected the first and softest of his three hits - a bunt single up the third-base line that spun past Gavin LaValley and stayed fair, moving Martin to third base. Third baseman Nick Tanielu then flied out to deep left field, deep enough to score Martin from third, making it 4-1, with two of the four runs unearned.

The River Bandits scored in the same innings Dayton committed errors Friday. In the fifth inning, Boyd and Tanielu hit consecutive two-out singles and then executed a double steal attempt, on which Long missed a throw to second base by catcher Garrett Boulware, and Boyd scored an unearned run for a 5-1 Quad Cities lead. Mahle was charged with five runs - two earned - on seven hits and one walk with two strikeouts in six innings, and he lost for the first time in the second half of the season.

In the seventh inning, a rally started with Martin's bunt that Kronenfeld was unable to field at first base, and was the fourth error charged to Dayton. Martin made it to third base on Boyd's double, and scored on a balk by reliever Ty Sterner, making it a 6-1 River Bandits lead.

The last run came in the bottom of the eighth inning, as second baseman Jose Fernandez tripled with two outs and scored on Stubbs' ground ball that went through the LaValley's legs at third base - the fifth and final error on the Dragons - to make it 7-1.

The second game of the series will see right-handers Joshua James (4-2, 2.93) of Quad Cities and Wyatt Strahan (6-8, 2.93) of Dayton match up on the mound for a 6 p.m. first pitch Saturday night at Modern Woodmen Park.

UP NEXT: When gates open at 5 p.m. Saturday, the first 1,500 fans receive a bobblehead of former River Bandit and St. Louis Cardinals pitcher Lance Lynn, courtesy of Ruhl & Ruhl Insurance. The 6 p.m. game is a Fan Appreciation Saturday presented by 101.3 KISS-FM and Nacho Radio. 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 late August. Finally, the club has expanded the children's play area by an additional 5,500 square feet down the right-field line, with additional bounce houses and the newest ride - Spin Zone Bumper Cars - as the latest attraction.

ValleyCats fall 1-0 to IronBirds

By: Tri-City ValleyCats

ABERDEEN, MD - Despite striking out eight batters, while allowing only four hits and no walks, the Tri-City ValleyCats fell 1-0 to the Aberdeen IronBirds at Ripken Stadium, in Aberdeen, Md., on Friday night.

One night after Kevin McCanna, Ralph Garza, and Zac Person combined to throw a no-hitter in a 5-0 victory, Ryan Deemes and Chris Murphy produced another solid pitching outing. In fact, Deemes, who got the start, did not allow a baserunner until Aberdeen left fielder D.J. Stewart singled to center field on a 3-2 pitch with two outs in the bottom of the fourth inning.

That concluded a streak of 13 full frames without the ValleyCats allowing a hit, dating back to the eighth inning of their matchup against the Hudson Valley Renegades, on Wednesday. It also snapped a stretch of 10.1 innings without allowing a baserunner, which originated after an IronBird reached on a walk in the bottom of the third inning, on Thursday.

Deemes went on to strike out six batters in five scoreless innings, before giving way to Murphy, who struck out two batters, and allowed only two hits, in three frames. Unfortunately, the IronBirds pushed a run across in the bottom of the seventh, to take a 1-0 lead, and that lead held for the rest of the game.

Offensively, Tri-City was led by left fielder Aaron Mizell, who went 2-for-3 with a walk, while Brooks Marlow went 1-for-3, with his fourth double in his last five games.

The ValleyCats and IronBirds will face off in the final game of this three-game set, at 7:05 p.m., on Saturday. On the mound for Tri-City will be RHP Trent Thornton (3-0, 3.82), with RHP Zach Albin (1-5, 4.88) getting the start for Aberdeen.

Astros rally for 6-3 victory over Pirates

By: Nick Carey / Greenville Astros

Greenville, TN - The Greenville Astros (23-19) took a 6-3, series-opening victory over the Bristol Pirates (19-22) at Pioneer Park on Friday night.

Though a rain delay during the top of the second inning pushed Friday night's fireworks display to Saturday, the Astros did not go without providing late game thrills when the showers subsided.

Greenville's offense was on the board early with a pair of runs in the bottom of the first inning. Myles Straw sparked the Astros efforts leading off the frame by reaching on a Pirates' error then taking second on a wild pitch with Daz Cameron at the plate. Cameron followed with a single to right to score Straw.

With Conner Goedert batting, Cameron stole his fifth base in his fifth game since joining the Astros then took third immediately afterwards on a throwing error. Goedert proceeded to score Cameron on a single to centerfield for his team-leading 30th RBI of 2015 and give the Astros the 2-0 lead.

The Pirates were held scoreless until the top of the seventh inning through the efforts of four Astros pitchers. Right-hander Diogenes Almengo started on the mound and threw one and two-thirds innings allowing no hits and striking out one batter before the rain hit.

Salvador Montaña took the hill after a nearly two-hour rain delay and tossed one and one-third inning allowing one hit. Moreno Polanco relieved Montaña and ventured three and two-thirds innings allowing three hits, three runs and striking out one.

The Astros added their third run in the home half of the fifth inning which was led off by an Osvaldo Duarte single to center. Duarte followed by swiping his 13th base of the season with Straw batting. Straw proceeded to draw a walk to put two runners on with no outs. Then, Cameron grounded into a fielding error to bring Duarte in for the run after the shortstop stole his second base of the inning and team-leading 14th of the season overall.

Bristol answered by tying the game at 3-3 in the top of the seventh with consecutive singles by Erik Lunde and Nick Buckner. After Lunde crossed the plate for the Pirates' first run, Edgar Figueroa doubled to right to score Buckner and close that gap to one run. The tying score came on a RBI single by Henry Rosario and retired Polanco for the night.

The Astros answered in the bottom of the seventh with a three-run rally led off by a walk drawn from Straw who moved to second on a bunt single by Cameron. Goedert followed with his team-high 14th double to score Straw and Cameron and give the Astros a 5-3 lead. The third and final run of the inning came when Goedert scored from third on a wild pitch with Kyle Tucker at the plate.

Cristhopher Santamaria picked up the win after Greenville's seventh inning rally and finished the night with one and one-third inning pitched, two hits allowed and two strikeouts. Twenty-year-old Joselo Pinales closed the door on the Pirates and picked up his first save pitching a flawless ninth inning with two strikeouts.

The Astros offense was led by Goedert who was two-for-three at the plate with a double, a run scored and three RBI. Straw concluded the night one-for-two, scored two runs, stole two bases and had three walks. Cameron finished the night two-for-four with two runs, a stolen base and one RBI.

Third baseman Arturo Michelena was two-for-four with a stolen base and Osvaldo Duarte was one-for-four with a run scored and a pair of stolen bases. Kyle Tucker was one-for-four with a stolen base.

By the end of the night, the Astros stole seven bases to set a new team record. The previous record of six was set against the Kingsport Mets on July 14, 2004, during the team's inaugural season.

The Astros face Bristol in the second game of the series at Pioneer Park on Saturday night with a 6 PM first pitch and post-game fireworks.

Elias Says...

By: Elias Sports Bureau / espn.com

Another multiple RBI game for Schwarber

From Elias: Kyle Schwarber had two hits and two RBIs, the third consecutive game he has driven in multiple runs, in the Cubs 7-3 win over the Giants at Wrigley Field. Schwarber became the first Cubs rookie to register multiple RBIs in at least three consecutive games since Randy Hundley did it in three straight contests during the 1966 season. Two other rookies have had two or more RBIs in three consecutive games this season: Alex Guerrero and Joc Pederson.

Mets mount three late-inning comebacks

From Elias: Juan Uribe hit a game-tying solo home run in the seventh inning, Daniel Murphy went deep to tie the game in the eighth inning and after falling behind again in the bottom of the eighth, the Mets pushed two runs across in the ninth inning to take the lead and held on for the win over the Rays on Friday night. It marked the first time in franchise history that the Mets either tied the score or took the lead in the seventh, eighth and ninth innings in the same game. Only one other major-league team has done that over the last 10 seasons: Seattle against the Angels on August 13, 2008.

Polanco ends Kershaw's streak on the first pitch

From Elias: Gregory Polanco hit the first pitch of the game for a home run ending Clayton Kershaw's scoreless streak at 37 innings in the Pirates' 5-4 win over the Dodgers on Friday night. Polanco's homer also ended Kershaw's streak of 42 consecutive starts without allowing a long ball in the first inning dating back to June of 2014. That was the longest such streak by a Dodger since Ramon Martinez went 65 consecutive starts without surrendering a first-inning homer from 1993 to 1995.

Polanco became the third player to lead off a game with a homer against Kershaw, joining Jimmy Rollins (September 1, 2010) and Chris Denorfia (September 4, 2012).

Bautista blasts Yankees in the 10th

From Elias: Jose Bautista's solo home run in the 10th inning proved to be the winning run in Toronto's 2-1 victory over the Yankees at Yankee Stadium on Friday night. Bautista entered the game with a .194 career batting average in extra innings, which was the fifth lowest average among active players with 90 or more at bats after the ninth inning ahead of Mark Reynolds, Mark Teixeira, Martin Prado and Jeff Francoeur.

The 2-1 final score marked the third consecutive game that there were three or fewer runs scored at Yankee Stadium. It's only the second time in the last 46 years that Yankee Stadium saw three or fewer runs scored in three consecutive games with the other instance coming in July of 2009.

CarGo stuns Nationals with two-out grand slam

From Elias: Carlos Gonzalez hit a two-out grand-slam home run in the top of the eighth inning turning a 4-1 deficit into a 5-4 lead in Colorado's win over Washington on Friday night. The only other players in Rockies' history to hit a two-out grand-slam home run turning a deficit into a lead in the eighth inning or later are Garrett Atkins against the Astros on June 28, 2005 and Melvin Mora against the Mets on August 11, 2010 (both previous homers occurred in the eighth inning).

Old man Hunter keeps on rolling along

From Elias: Torii Hunter hit a go-ahead home run in the top of the ninth inning which turned out to be the game winner in the Twins' 10-9 victory over the Indians on Friday night. Hunter, at 40 years and 20 days old, became the second oldest player to hit a go-ahead home run in the ninth or later for the Twins since the franchise moved to Minnesota in 1961. On July 10, 1993, Hall of Famer Dave Winfield hit a two run homer in the top of the ninth inning against Milwaukee turning a 3-2 deficit into a 4-3 lead in a game Minnesota would lose by a score of 5-4.

Another home run at Comerica for Ortiz

From Elias: David Ortiz homered and drove in two runs to help lead the Red Sox to a 7-2 win over the Tigers in Detroit on Friday night. Ortiz has now hit 20 home runs in 198 career at bats at Comerica Park. Ortiz's home run per 9.9 at bats ratio at Comerica is the best for any player with 150 or more at bats in Detroit's current home ballpark.

Cards blank Brewers at Miller Field

From Elias: The Cardinals scored six runs in the fifth inning and blanked the Brewers by a score of 6-0 in Milwaukee on Friday night. It marked the 11th time that St. Louis shut out the Brewers at Miller Field since Milwaukee began playing its home games there in 2001. That's by far the most shutouts posted by any visiting team against the Brewers at that ballpark (next most: 7 by the Cubs).

Cruz and Cano go back-to-back against Hamels

From Elias: Nelson Cruz and Robinson Cano hit back-to-back home runs off Cole Hamels in the sixth inning turning a 3-2 deficit into a 4-3 lead and the Mariners held on to defeat the Rangers by that score on Friday night. Hamels had not allowed consecutive home runs in any of his last 168 appearances, since the Padres' Adrian Gonzalez and Scott Hairston did it to him on June 7, 2010. Prior to that, Hamels had allowed back-to-back homers seven times in his first 128 major-league appearances.

Markakis has a three-hit night

From Elias: Nick Markakis had three hits and drove in two runs in the Braves' 6-3 win over the Marlins on Friday night. It marked the 135th time that Markakis has delivered at least three hits in a game since he entered the major leagues in 2006. The only major-league players with more three-hit games than Markakis over the last 10 seasons are Miguel Cabrera (148), Adrian Gonzalez (146), Joe Mauer (137) and Ichiro Suzuki (136).

Castillo keeps his power surge going

From Elias: Wellington Castillo's solo home run in the seventh inning accounted for one of Arizona's two runs in the team's 2-0 win over the Reds on Friday night. Castillo has now hit seven home runs over his last 10 games, equaling the number of long balls he hit in his first 63 games of the season. Castillo's seven homers since July 27 are tied with Lucas Duda and Nelson Cruz for the major-league lead over that span.

A's get a rare homer from their cleanup hitter

From Elias: Danny Valencia went 2-for-3 with a home run batting in the cleanup spot in the A's 3-1 win over the Astros on Friday night. Oakland entered the day's action with only seven homers from the fourth spot in the batting order, tied with the Pirates for the lowest total in the major leagues. Last season, Oakland's cleanup hitters ranked fifth in the majors with 30 homers.

Iannetta gets the big hit in Angels' win

From Elias: Chris Iannetta's two-out two-run double in the sixth inning turned a 4-3 deficit into a 5-4 lead in a game the Angels would go on to win 8-4 over the Orioles on Friday night. It marked only the second time that Iannetta turned a deficit into a lead with a two-out hit in the sixth inning or later in his 831-game career, having previously done that on May 7, 2008 with a two-run triple in the eighth inning.

8.8.15 OPPONENT AT OAKLAND ATHLETICS

Gray continues dominant stretch with gem

Right-hander tosses third complete game in last six starts

By: Trevor Hass / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Before Thursday's 3-1 win over the Astros, Josh Phegley and a couple A's teammates joked about getting a pool together to see how short the game would be.

Phegley guessed two hours. It ended up lasting two hours, 20 minutes, but he wasn't far off.

In the end, one of the most anticipated pitching matchups in the American League this season lived up to the hype. Sonny Gray bested Dallas Keuchel, tossing his third complete game in six starts.

Gray said there wasn't any extra adrenaline going up against the bearded southpaw Keuchel. He tried to block the matchup out, instead placing his focus on shutting down a potent lineup, which is exactly what he did.

"I'm not really pitching against the other pitcher," Gray said. "It's the other team, and their lineup. That's really what my focus is going in."

"I don't think it matters who he goes against," Phegley said. "He's just out to prove he's one of the best pitchers in the American League."

Gray allowed five hits and one run in nine brisk innings, striking out five and needing just 107 pitches to go the distance. The right-hander has a 1.13 ERA and .193 opponents' batting average over his last four starts, in which he's yielded a combined four runs.

Gray retired the first seven Astros he faced, and 17 of the first 19 before Luis Valbuena accounted for Houston's only run with a solo shot to right.

Then Gray settled back down and cruised into the eighth, where Danny Valencia started a 5-4-3 double play that helped enable Gray to come back out for the ninth.

Valencia said playing behind Gray is easy because you're constantly on your toes. Gray pitches so efficiently and induces so many ground balls that you know the ball may come your way the next pitch.

A's manager Bob Melvin and Gray talked before the ninth to make sure Gray was OK to return to the mound, but both were confident he would be fine and finish what he started.

"Pretty much came as advertised as far as the billing went and the pitching performances went," Melvin said. "Sonny was just a little better tonight."

He's been the A's rock during a season where not much has gone according to plan, and his ERA now sits at an American League-best 2.06.

Gray deflects all the credit, but Phegley -- acknowledging it's only August and there's lots of baseball to be played -- said Gray is a top Cy Young candidate to this point.

"I haven't seen anyone better," he said. "The stuff that he's managed to do, with our record, and us losing a lot of games this year has been tough. He goes out there and puts together a performance every time he's on the mound, so he's right up there."

Valencia stars with bat, glove in win over Astros

Infielder makes impressive play, hits first homer with A's

By: Trevor Hass / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Danny Valencia says the success he's had against Dallas Keuchel largely comes down to luck.

But on Friday, in the A's 3-1 win over the Astros, that luck continued to go Valencia's way. He finished 2-for-3 with a solo shot in his second game with the A's, boosting his career numbers against the lefty to 7-for-12 with two home runs.

"He's a tough at-bat every time I'm in there," Valencia said. "I feel like I'm always battling. Fortunately enough, I got some pitches out over the plate and I was able to hit them hard."

The one he hit the hardest came in the third inning, when he tattooed a ball to left to give Oakland a 2-0 lead. Valencia said the ball was middle in -- maybe a little high -- and he made what he called a defensive swing that turned into home run.

The A's claimed Valencia off waivers from the Blue Jays on Monday with the hopes he would be a specialist against lefties, a power bat in the heart of the order and a reliable fielder.

He was all three Friday, batting in the cleanup spot because of his prior success against Keuchel.

"Really glad we got him," said Sonny Gray, who tossed a complete game in the win. "Don't really pick up guys like that out of the blue. He's a really talented player. He adds some pop in the middle of the order, for sure."

Valencia made multiple nice fielding plays, including one in the seventh where he tracked down a Preston Tucker pop up in foul ground.

He casually made the catch, but covered a significant amount of ground in the process.

"By no means did I think that was an easy catch," Valencia said. "It felt a lot tougher for me than maybe it looked."

First pitch from Burns' sister continues tradition

Outfielder's older sister set to compete in INAS Global Games

By: Trevor Hass / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Abbey Burns confidently strolled to the mound in her USA shirt, delivered an accurate first pitch, twirled around, flashed a broad smile and hugged her younger brother, Billy.

If it looked like Abbey and Billy Burns had done this routine before, well, that's because they have. The tradition started when Billy played at Mercer University, and ever since then, at nearly every stop of his baseball career, Abbey has thrown out the first pitch.

Friday marked the first time she did so at a Major League stadium. Abbey, who has special needs and is five and a half years older than Billy, is an accomplished athlete herself. She'll compete at the INAS Global Games in Quito, Ecuador, next month as a swimmer.

"It's as big a deal for her as Billy going to the World Series," their mother, Terry Burns, said of the Games. "It's pretty fantastic."

Watching her daughter throw out a first pitch is special every single time for Terry Burns, but one particular pitch stands out as her favorite.

Billy played for the Harwich Mariners in the Cape Cod Baseball League in the summer of 2011. Right before Abbey was about to go throw her pitch, a voice boomed from the loudspeaker and introduced her: "Abbey Burns, of the Burns family, competes in Special Olympics."

"As soon as they said Special Olympics, the clapping started," Terry Burns said, "and it went like a wave through the stadium and then the people started standing. To me that was a very touching moment."

For Billy, having Abbey throw out the first pitch is a chance for them to spend some time together. He consistently reminds her to keep her arm loose the week leading up to the pitch.

Burns catches every time, and he loves seeing Abbey's face light up. It never gets old.

"It makes her world just to be out there," Billy Burns said.

"It gives her a little bit of the celebrity status that her brother's always had," Terry Burns said. "She warms up beforehand. She wants to throw an accurate pitch. She's thrilled to death when the coaches come over and say, 'Wow, that's better than the pitcher.'"

Billy and Abbey have been close since a young age. Abbey said their bond strengthened when their older brother, Bobby, went to Iraq.

They used to swim together as kids, and eventually Terry Burns realized her daughter had a knack for swimming.

Abbey started competing in Special Olympics five years ago through the community for disabled adults where she lives. Three years later, the Burns family got a call from a local coach who was forming a team for athletes with disabilities near where they live in Marietta, Georgia.

He wanted Abbey to join the team.

Now she swims two hours about three times a week, and the training is intense. Bungee cords, shoes in the water, the whole deal. Her specialty is the butterfly, a stroke most people struggle to master. Abbey has set S14 US Paralympic American records in a variety of strokes.

"It's really exciting because I've been swimming since I was 4," Abbey said. "I never expected to get to this level."

Though Billy will be with the A's while she's competing in Ecuador, he'll be sure to check in for updates from his big sister whenever possible, just like he always does.

He's seen the work she puts in first hand. Much like he thrives to excel at baseball, she works tirelessly to flourish in the water.

"Billy is a huge promoter of her," Terry Burns said. "He doesn't downsize what she's doing. He encourages it."

There's a running joke in the Burns family about who the best athlete in the family is. Billy gives Abbey the title, but Abbey sums it up best.

"I think it's about equal," Abbey Burns said. "I can swim better than he can, but I can't run as fast as he can. It kind of equals out."

A's acquire Frias to complete deal with Mets

By: Trevor Hass / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's acquired Minor League right-hander Dawrin Frias from the Mets as the player to be named later in the Aug. 4 trade for Eric O'Flaherty, the club announced on Friday.

Frias, 23, began the season in extended spring training before he was sent to Class A Savannah on May 5. He went 0-2 with an 8.71 ERA in 15 relief appearances with the Sand Gnats before being transferred to Short-Season Class A Brooklyn on July 19.

He compiled a 3.38 ERA in four relief appearances with Brooklyn, yielding three earned runs and striking out 10 batters in eight innings.

The Mets originally signed Frias on Oct. 9, 2008, as a non-drafted free agent out of the Dominican Republic.