

# ASTROS DAILY CLIPS

## MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2015

### Keuchel, Astros stun Twins to pad West lead

By: Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

HOUSTON -- With the roar of a Sunday crowd serving as a deafening soundtrack, shortstop Jed Lowrie thrust his right hand high into the air as he neared first base after coming through with one of the Astros' biggest hits of the season.

Lowrie's seventh-inning grand slam off Twins reliever Trevor May sent Minute Maid Park into a frenzy and allowed starting pitcher Dallas Keuchel to remain unbeaten at home in the Astros' 8-5 win in the series finale.

"That was a pretty exciting dugout during that whole inning, but specifically when you get a grand slam like that, that was an energized a dugout as you can imagine," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "A big inning for us. We had runners on base all day, but that by far was the biggest hit I think this team needed to get that series win."

Keuchel (17-6) became the American League's first 17-game winner and improved to 13-0 with a 1.49 ERA at home this season, winning his club-record 14th consecutive decision at Minute Maid Park dating back to 2014. In eight innings of work, he allowed solo homers to Brian Dozier, Eduardo Escobar and Aaron Hicks and struck out 12.

Twins starter Tyler Duffey held the Astros to two runs in 6 2/3 innings. The Astros trailed, 2-0, in the seventh when Jose Altuve beat out a two-out infield hit with the bases loaded to score a run, setting the stage for Lowrie's dramatic blast that put Houston ahead, 5-2.

"A reliever's job is to pick up the guy before you, and Duffey pitched his butt off, so it's my job to get him out of trouble there at the end," May said. "It was just one guy I had to get out, and I faced four and didn't get any out. So in short, I blew it and I'm looking forward to another chance to get out there."

The first-place Astros exit their homestand with a three-game lead over the second-place Rangers in the American League West, and a 5 1/2-game edge over the third-place Angels. The Twins trail the Rangers by 1 1/2 games for the second AL Wild Card spot.

#### MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

**Grand slammed:** Lowrie blew the roof off Minute Maid Park when he launched a game-changing grand slam to right field -- off the bat at 97 mph, according to Statcast™. It was the Astros' fourth grand slam this season -- all of which have come since Aug. 1 -- and first by a non-catcher. [More >](#)

"We weren't really hitting the ball very hard, and then when we got the opportunity, I think everybody took a big sigh of relief and had a little fun," Lowrie said.

**Close play at third spoils rally:** The Twins had two runners on with nobody out in the seventh, and Escobar laid down a sacrifice bunt but Luis Valbuena threw to third to get Trevor Plouffe on a close play. Plouffe was adamant the throw pulled Lowrie off the bag at third, but Twins manager Paul Molitor didn't ask for a challenge. It ended up being a big play, as Keuchel got out of the inning without allowing a run.

"The throw definitely beat me, but I think he was off third base by a couple of inches," Plouffe said. "Paul [Schrieber] was there and he's a great umpire, but I don't think he saw it. And according to everyone who looked at the replay, there was no real clear angle, so it was a tough play for us."

**Home sweet home:** Keuchel set a club record by winning his 14th consecutive decision at home, breaking the record of 13 set by Danny Darwin (1989-90). Keuchel's 13 wins in home decisions without a loss in a single season also ties a Major League record, becoming one of only four pitchers to do that since 1914. [More >](#)

"I try to do my job every fifth day out, whether that's at home or on the road," he said. "I'll take them as they come. But it's definitely been nice to pitch at home with the support we've had this year, kind of the turnaround we've made. I'll take it, but I like to pitch well on the road as well."

**Houston native sharp:** Duffey, who grew up in Houston and attended Rice University, had a strong outing in front of roughly 30 friends and family members but was stuck with a no-decision. The right-hander struck out eight and exited with the Twins up, 2-0, with two runners on in the seventh. But May came in and gave up five runs, including two charged to Duffey. [More >](#)

"Once you get out there on the field, it's game time, so you're just trying to stay focused and get people out," Duffey said. "It was fun. To pitch at home, that could never happen again. It just lined up. So it's just one of those things that was fun today."

#### QUOTABLE

"This was definitely a nice win to end the homestand and kick-start on a key 10-game division road trip. We're going to see what we're made of here in the next 10 days, and hopefully we come out above .500." -- Keuchel, on the Astros' upcoming series against the Athletics, Angels and Rangers

"I was happy for him. We talked about it before the game, coming into your hometown. You could hear people cheering for him every time he left the field. He was pretty much in control for the time he was out there. We know when he has his good curveball he's tough on lefties and righties." -- Molitor on Duffey

#### SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Altuve leads the AL with 18 three-hit games.

#### WHAT'S NEXT

Twins: The Twins head to Kansas City for a three-game series against the first-place Royals that starts Monday at 7:10 p.m. CT. Left-hander Tommy Milone starts the series opener and is coming off a strong start, as he held the White Sox scoreless over seven innings on Wednesday.

Astros: The Astros begin a 10-game road trip with a three-game series at the A's at 3:05 p.m. CT Monday when Mike Fiers (7-9, 3.54 ERA) takes the mound. Fiers has a 0.67 ERA in his four starts as an Astro, including the franchise's 11th no-hitter -- and first in Minute Maid Park history -- on Aug. 21 against the Dodgers.

### **At home in Houston: Keuchel sets club mark**

*Astros' ace wins 14th straight home decision with 12-K day*

By: Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

HOUSTON -- He's been the best pitcher in the American League this season, and one of the best at home in the history of the game.

Astros lefty Dallas Keuchel took another step toward winning the AL Cy Young Award by becoming the league's first 17-game winner, allowing three solo homers and striking out 12 batters in an 8-5 win over the Twins on Sunday afternoon at Minute Maid Park.

Keuchel (17-6), who has been named AL Pitcher of the Month three times this season, improved to 13-0 with a 1.49 ERA at home, setting a franchise record by winning his 14th consecutive home decision (Danny Darwin had the previous record in 1989-90).

"I try to do my job every fifth day out, whether that's at home or on the road, I'll take them as they come," said Keuchel, whose next two starts are on the road, where he's 4-6 with a 3.35 ERA. "But it's definitely been nice to pitch at home with the support we've had this year, kind of the turnaround we've made. I'll take it, but I like to pitch well on the road as well."

What's more, Keuchel became the Astros' first 17-game winner since Roy Oswalt in 2008 and tied a Major League record by winning his first 13 decisions at home in a season. That hadn't been accomplished since 1946 and had been done three times since 1914.

"A good game by Dallas," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "He is going to challenge the strike zone, and when he does leave a mistake or two up, against some home run-style hitters, it can come back to bite him a little bit."

Keuchel hadn't given up a home run at home this season before allowing one Monday against the Mariners. Brian Dozier, Eduardo Escobar and Aaron Hicks touched him for solo homers on Sunday.

"I gave them up today," he said. "I have to figure that one out. Three bad pitches, and they did what they were supposed to do. I thought that was going to be the difference in the game but we came through when we needed to most."

The force is strong with #KeuchelsKorner on #StarWarsDay! pic.twitter.com/G2vfunqBNr  
— Houston Astros (@astros) September 6, 2015

### **Lowrie's slam caps Astros' galactic rally**

*Altuve's infield RBI hit sets stage for Star Wars Day heroics*

By: Chandler Rome / MLB.com

HOUSTON -- It was Star Wars Day in Minute Maid Park, but Sunday was not "The Return of Jed Lowrie." Questioned about an 0-for-28 slump he endured during a brutal Aug. 19-29 stretch, Lowrie -- who spent 82 games on the disabled list with a torn ligament in his right thumb this season -- always maintained he was seeing the ball well.

"I feel like I've been hitting the ball pretty well since coming back and even during that slump I was hitting the ball hard," Lowrie said. "It's nice to get rewarded when you get the luck eventually."

Lowrie's go-ahead grand slam in Sunday's series-clinching 8-5 win over the Twins -- off the bat at 97 mph, according to Statcast™ -- was just the prize he'd been eyeing.

The 2-1 changeup from Trevor May hung in the strike zone and Lowrie belted it, letting out an audible yell as soon as ball met bat. It sent Lowrie sprinting around the basepaths with adrenaline, nearly passing speedster Jose Altuve, who was jogging to revel in the moment.

Without Altuve, though, Lowrie's heroics wouldn't have been possible.

With the bases loaded and two out in a 2-0 game, Altuve drove May's 2-2 pitch to third baseman Trevor Plouffe, who couldn't make the play in time to get the speedy Altuve hustling down the line.

"I wish I could've barehanded it, but I was going to my left a little too much to get my hand over," Plouffe said. "That's what his speed does, putting pressure on the defense. I like to think I could make that play, and I wish I could've, but that was definitely a big turning point."

Lowrie followed with the mammoth grand slam, which bounced off the facade between the second and first deck in right field and sent a huge Sunday crowd of 37,648 into pandemonium.

The always boisterous Astros dugout followed suit, especially after being handcuffed by Twins starter and Houston native Tyler Duffey through the better part of six innings.

"Just felt like a lot of pent-up emotion," Lowrie said. "That game, nothing really happening, we weren't really hitting the ball very hard and then when we got the opportunity, I think everybody took a big sigh of relief and had a little fun."

With the recently healed George Springer getting a routine day off Sunday, Lowrie slid into the two-hole, where he teamed with Altuve for the late-inning heroics. Springer's return Monday probably means Lowrie slides back to the five- or six-hole.

That's just fine for the veteran infielder, who picked up perhaps the Astros' biggest hit of the season and reinforced the young group brimming with confidence in advance of a 10-game American League West road trip.

"We've got some threats at the bottom of the order who could conceivably hit higher in the order," said Astros manager A.J. Hinch. "It's something I've talked about all year, about why I don't really care about the order as much as many other people do. I feel like how it functions is really important and we get contributions throughout."

## **Astros open 10-game trip with Fiers facing A's**

By: Chandler Rome / MLB.com

Two midseason acquisitions will take the mound Monday afternoon, when Astros righty Mike Fiers opposes Athletics southpaw Felix Doubront to open a three-game set at the Coliseum in Oakland.

Fiers, a Trade Deadline addition from the Brewers along with center fielder Carlos Gomez, has a 0.67 ERA in four starts as an Astro, including the franchise's 11th no-hitter -- and first in Minute Maid Park history -- on Aug. 21 against the Dodgers.

In his first start since the no-hitter, Fiers tossed six innings of one-run ball on Aug. 29 in a 4-1 victory over the Twins. His turn in the rotation was skipped this go-round, so he'll be throwing on nine days' rest.

Doubront, who came over from the Blue Jays at the Deadline, has a 3.28 ERA in five appearances with the A's, which includes three starts.

The Astros -- who are opening a 10-game road trip -- will be looking to strengthen their standing atop the American League West against the cellar-dwelling A's.

Three things to know about this game

- Astros manager A.J. Hinch said catcher Jason Castro, who went on the disabled list on Aug. 29 with a right quad strain, won't travel with the team. Castro will stay back to ratchet up his rehab in hopes of a return once his 15-day DL stint is up.
- Astros right fielder George Springer, who was out of the lineup Sunday as a scheduled day off, will play all three games in the series, Hinch said. Springer was activated Friday from a two-month stint on the disabled list after he fractured his right wrist July 1.
- This is just Doubront's second career start against the Astros. He threw 6 2/3 innings of three-hit ball with four walks and eight strikeouts against Houston in April 2013 while with the Red Sox.

## **Former Astros broadcaster Elston dies at 93**

*Nolan Ryan: HOF voice 'was a big part of my life' growing up*

By: Chandler Rome / MLB.com

HOUSTON -- Gene Elston, the longtime Astros radio broadcaster, Texas Baseball Hall of Famer and 2006 Ford C. Frick Award winner, died on Saturday. Elston was 93.

"We are deeply saddened by the passing of Gene Elston," Astros President of Business Operations Reid Ryan said in a statement. "Gene helped introduce baseball to Houston as a part of the original broadcast team of the Colt .45s when the franchise was born in 1962. For 25 seasons, he served as the lead voice of the Colt .45s and Astros and called many of the great moments in franchise history. The memories he helped create are cherished fondly by the generations of Astros fans that he touched."

"On behalf of the entire Astros organization, I send my deepest condolences to Gene's family members and to his many friends and fans."

- Justice: Elston was great broadcaster and better man

Elston was the lead voice of the Astros from the beginning, starting in 1962 when the franchise was still called the Colt .45s and ending after the 1986 season, when the Astros captured a National League West Championship. He called 11 no-hitters, including one of Nolan Ryan's and Mike Scott's that clinched the National League West title on Sept. 25, 1986. Also among his broadcasting feats was Eddie Matthews' 500th home run.

"Gene worked in the era that radio brought the game into our cars and into our homes," said Nolan Ryan, who listened to Elston while growing up in Alvin. "As a kid growing up in Texas, my connection to Major League Baseball was through Gene and his radio partners. It was a big part of my life. It was a great experience for me to be around Gene when I came to Houston as a player. He had a real passion and commitment to baseball."

His career in broadcasting began in 1945 when, after serving in the Navy during World War II, he was a color commentator for the NFL's Cleveland Rams. A year later he began broadcasting baseball, calling games for the Waterloo White Hawks before moving to the Western League's Des Moines team three years later.

Elston broadcasted alongside Bob Feller in 1958 for Mutual's Game of the Day before joining the Astros as they became an expansion franchise. After leaving Houston, he worked the CBS Radio Game of the Week from 1987-1995 and CBS postseason games from 1995-97.

"Gene Elston brought a classic broadcasting approach to Houston as the first voice of Major League Baseball in Texas," current Astros broadcaster Bill Brown said. "His smooth style emphasized accuracy and depth of knowledge about the game's history. He was the perfect baseball teacher for the generation of fans who built their loyalty to the Colt .45s and Astros through his stewardship."

Elston was inducted into the Texas Baseball Hall of Fame in 1993 and the Texas Radio Hall of Fame in 2002.

The Astros held a moment of silence for Elston in the middle of the eighth inning of Saturday night's game and had a pregame tribute scheduled for Sunday at Minute Maid Park.

#Astros observe moment of silence in memory of Gene Elston, Hall of Fame announcer who passed away yesterday.  
pic.twitter.com/CCQeVv9o8e  
— Houston Astros (@astros) September 6, 2015

## **Elston was great broadcaster and better man**

*Longtime voice of the Astros represented the sound of summer for fans*

By: Richard Justice / MLB.com

Perhaps the greatest tribute to Gene Elston is that by the time I actually walked inside the Astrodome for the first time, I already had a feel for it. Fifty years later, I'm still amazed by this.

In his precise, uncluttered broadcasting style, Gene reconstructed it in the hearts and minds of the people at home. He got it exactly right, too. Not just the details, but Judge Roy Hofheinz's vision.

The Astrodome represented a triumph of both engineering and the human spirit. Gene described it inning by inning, night by night, capturing the vastness and majesty of the structure. To see the roof and the scoreboard, the dugouts and theater seats for the first time was to feel you'd returned.

Gene, who died Saturday at 93, represented the very best of baseball on the radio. Long before virtually every game was on television, Gene was one of the primary connections to the games and the players.

As the first voice of the Colt .45s in 1962, Gene played a huge role in helping to establish Major League Baseball in Houston. With the opening of the Astrodome in '65, the team became known as the Astros.

Gene was the primary voice of the team for 25 seasons. He was a great broadcaster and an even greater gentleman -- a humble, gracious man who worked relentlessly to improve his craft. Years later, Gene would grudgingly acknowledge that by his final decade on the job, he'd started to get pretty darn good at doing baseball games. Plenty of others thought so, too. In 2006, Gene was given his profession's highest honor -- the Ford C. Frick Award -- by the Baseball Hall of Fame.

I didn't know Astros third baseman Bob Aspromonte and center fielder Jimmy Wynn in those years, but Gene got them right, too, from Aspro's backhanded grabs on the third-base foul line to the Toy Cannon's monster home runs.

Gene was a minimalist. He set the scene, described the action, found context. Some baseball broadcasters saw themselves as entertainers. Gene saw himself as a reporter, delivering the story 162 times a year.

Vin Scully would say exactly the same thing about his own style. Jon Miller of the Giants and Eric Nadel of the Rangers are among dozens of baseball's greatest broadcasters to express their appreciation for how Gene did his job.

I once told Gene that his final call on Don Wilson's 1967 no-hitter had stayed with me for decades. I asked if he remembered what he said when Wilson got the final out.

"He got it?" Gene said. "Something like that."

Yep.

"He got it!"

That was Gene's call, and then he set the scene of the celebration and the madness. But the important thing was the no-hitter itself.

He believed it was important for listeners to have a moment to take it all in. Scully has always done things like that, sometimes even walking out into the hallway to prevent himself from saying something that would infringe upon the moment.

Gene believed that to say anything at a time like that would somehow lessen the impact. Sometimes, we just want to experience it for ourselves without someone screaming about it.

Not everyone agreed. Gene had a similar understated call when Mike Scott's no-hitter during the 1986 season clinched a playoff berth.

"There it is!" was Gene's call.

And then he backed off a bit. That game was on television, and so there was nothing Gene could say that would be better than what a generation of long-suffering fans were seeing.

The Astros decided after that season that they wanted the voice of their team to be a bit more of a showman, and they made Milo Hamilton the voice of the team. Milo will also be remembered as one of the great broadcasters of his time, but his style couldn't have been more different from Gene's.

Gene did the CBS National Game of the Week on the radio through the 1997 season. If he was bitter about the way things played out, he never said so. He was a kid who grew up in the Midwest and fulfilled a dream by getting to spend his adult life talking about baseball.

In the end, it was Astros fans who got lucky. He made doing a baseball game on the radio his own art form. He became the background sound of our summers -- never intruded, never annoyed.

He was just comfortable to listen to, and his death brings back a flood of memories of the teams and players of Gene's time behind the microphone. He was part of those memories, too -- one of the best parts.

He was a good man who lived a rich, full life. His dignity and honesty became part of the appeal of baseball itself, and as legacies go, that's a really good one.

## **Astros eye 5-man rotation with Feldman out**

*Right-hander felt shoulder discomfort after playing catch*

By" Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

HOUSTON -- It appears the Astros will be without starting pitcher Scott Feldman for the near future. Just how long Feldman will be out won't be known until he's seen by a doctor, but that won't happen until Tuesday or Wednesday.

Whatever the case, the Astros will be back to a five-man rotation, perhaps for the rest of the season. Feldman's ailing right shoulder didn't respond well when he played catch on Saturday, and manager A.J. Hinch said Sunday Feldman wouldn't pitch on the 10-game road trip that begins Monday in Oakland.

Feldman left his start Tuesday with right shoulder discomfort and was diagnosed with inflammation after undergoing an MRI. He had pitched great coming off the DL following knee surgery, going 1-1 with a 2.36 ERA in seven starts prior to Tuesday.

"I'm always concerned when a guy has some discomfort," Hinch said. "Certainly, we're at the time of year you want all hands on deck and you want to have your guys ready. It's certainly discouraging to have him not feeling well playing catch."

The Astros have been using a six-man rotation for the past few weeks to ease the innings burden on some of the guys, like rookie Lance McCullers. Lefty Dallas Keuchel entered his start Sunday 7 1/3 innings shy of tying his career high of 200.

Hinch said the Astros will stick with five starters and have the advantage of a couple of off-days.

"Any time you lose somebody that's at the top of their game it's very difficult to absorb," he said. "We're lucky to have a good starting rotation with the other five guys. The next man will step up."

Worth noting

- Left-handed reliever Tony Sipp (back) will play catch in the next day or so to see if he's ready to start throwing. Even so, Hinch said it would take a couple of days of playing catch and a bullpen session before Sipp could be ready to return to action.
- Catcher Jason Castro, who's on the disabled list with a right quad strain, won't travel with the team on the next trip. He'll stay in Houston and work with physical therapist Matt Holland. Castro is eligible to come off the DL on Saturday, and Hinch said it would be based on how much baseball activity he can endure if he will be ready to be activated then.

## Dallas Keuchel's heap of strikeouts adds to his elite status

By: Evan Drellich / Houston Chronicle

It's not worth griping over three home runs when they're three solo shots and the Astros won, so Dallas Keuchel's 17th win Sunday in an 8-5 Astros victory over the Twins is best remembered for its count of innings, eight, and strikeouts, 12.

With 200 2/3 innings, Keuchel's already surpassed his innings count of 200 even last year, and is just 15 strikeouts away from reaching 200 Ks — a mark that, at the start of the season, didn't seem likely.

Keuchel's uptick in strikeouts has helped elevate an already elite pitcher.

"Any way I can get an out, I'll take it. But yeah, strikeouts are nice. It's a sexy stat," Keuchel said. "Nobody likes ground ball outs anymore. If you're a geek you like ground balls, but if you're peripheral (watcher) like everyone else is, strikeouts are nice. But it's not on the forefront of my mind at all."

Keuchel noted he wasn't celebrating an innings count yet and quipped that he was prematurely pulled at times last year, suggesting he could've had even more innings in 2014 than he finished with.

As for the strikeouts, he didn't pinpoint a particular change that's led to them. But all four double-digit strikeout games in his career have come this season.

"Just better command just more comfortable with myself and the strike zone and just repeating mechanics," Keuchel said earlier this homestand. "I just command the ball in the zone, and I mean if that generates more swings and misses than that's great. I'm trying to conserve pitches and go deep in games."

"I think I've been making better pitches with two strikes. Or when I get to two strikes, I'm really bearing down or making the best pitch I possibly can. It's not like I'm trying to do... It just so happens that maybe my ball's moving a little bit more, side to side, up and down."

Keuchel's changeup does seem to have more movement of late, per BrooksBaseball.net.

The Cy Young hopeful has allowed homers in two consecutive home starts after not doing so previously this season, but he's still rather untouchable at Minute Maid Park.

Keuchel has a 1.49 ERA in 16 home starts and is 13-0 in his first home decisions to start the year, tying a major league record that's been reached four times from 1914 on. The last was righty Dave Ferriss in 1946.

The last time an Astros pitcher won 17 games was Roy Oswalt, in 2008, when he went 17-10.

### ODDS AND ENDS

Jake Buchanan, recently designated for assignment to make room for Joe Thatcher on the 40-man roster, was outrighted to Class AAA Fresno.

Because he finished his 45th game of the season, Luke Gregerson will make an additional \$250,000 next year.

## Outlook not encouraging for injured Astros starting pitcher Scott Feldman

By: Evan Drellich / Houston Chronicle

The Astros should learn more about Scott Feldman's right shoulder this week when he goes for further testing, but the veteran is not expected back in the rotation on this road trip, and it's possible he won't have enough time to make a return at all, which would be an unfortunate turn for the pitcher and team as the season winds down.

Feldman played catch Saturday and it didn't go well. He received a cortisone shot last week to ease inflammation in the posterior cuff of his right shoulder.

The righty is to travel with the team to California for the start of a three-city, 10-game road trip Monday in Oakland.

"It was discouraging to have him not feel well," manager A.J. Hinch said.

After Feldman posted a 1.33 ERA in August, best in the American League, his first start in September on Tuesday saw him leave because of the injury in the third inning.

"He was great in August. Our whole rotation was," Hinch said. "(Dallas) Keuchel won the (monthly AL) award. I think we had three or four guys that could've been up for it, Feldman being one of them. Any time you lose somebody that's at the top of their game, it's very difficult to absorb."

Feldman had shoulder problems early last season, but recovered from them to have a fine season. That injury was listed as biceps tendinitis.

The Astros aren't about to add another starting pitcher in Feldman's absence. Vince Velasquez is to stay in the bullpen, Hinch said, although the Astros reserve the right to slide him in for a start at some point this month if they felt it necessary.

Catcher Jason Castro, on the disabled list with a strained right quad, is expected to rejoin the team in Anaheim, where a three-game series starts on Friday.

Lefty reliever Tony Sipp, who's dealing with something of a mysterious back/oblique injury because the exact cause has been hard to pinpoint, is expected to make the road trip as well.

## Scouting report: Astros vs. Athletics

By: Evan Drellich / Houston Chronicle

Three things to watch in the series:

1. Of the three series on this 10-game road trip, the A's could be looked at as a warm-up. The Angels (three games) and Rangers (four games) are the Astros' biggest threats in the division, and winning the first series before facing the two biggest rivals would be a boon for the Astros as they try to nail down the American League West. "We know exactly where we sit, we know exactly the opportunity that we have," manager A.J. Hinch said. "We're going to go wear our grey uniforms. I get the curiosity over how well we're going to play on the road. I think a win like (Sunday's over the Twins) could certainly pay dividends as we get out on the road against Oakland. ... There's no secret these are big games. Wins against any team at this particular stage in the year are going to be big. And there'll be a lot of attention paid to the Anaheim series and the Texas series. Oakland plays us pretty hard and they play us tough and it's been a difficult place for the Astros."

2. Jed Lowrie is on fire and George Springer is back, which may be diverting attention from Carlos Gomez, who is hitting .310 (13-for-42) with four doubles in his last 11 games. He hit just .181 in his first 22 games with the Astros. Springer had a planned off-day Sunday but is to play all three games in Oakland. After Thursday's off-day, Hinch doesn't expect Springer will need built-in breaks beyond the usual.

3. The A's lost their fifth straight Sunday, 3-2 to the Mariners despite a ninth-inning rally and are really skidding. They've lost eight of their last 11 and 16 of 24 as they've fallen to a season-high 21 games under .500 (58-79), the worst record in the American League. The A's are 15-31 in one-run games, and the club record for one-run losses in a season is 32, set by the 1976 A's.

Pitching matchups:

Monday: RHP Mike Fiers (7-9, 3.54 ERA, K/9: 8.4, W/9: 3.4) vs. LHP Felix Doubront (1-0, 3.28 ERA, K/9: 8.0, W/9: 4.0).

Tuesday: LHP Scott Kazmir (2-4, 2.77 ERA, K/9: 7.6, W/9: 2.8) vs. RHP Sonny Gray (12-7, 2.36 ERA, K/9: 7.3, W/9: 2.3).

Wednesday: RHP Collin McHugh (15-7, 3.75 ERA, K/9: 7.4, W/9: 2.3) vs. RHP Aaron Brooks (1-2, 7.03 ERA, K/9: 7.4, W/9: 2.2).

## Astronaut Terry Virts throws out ceremonial first pitch as Astros host 'Star Wars Day'

By: Stephanie Kuzydym / Houston Chronicle

Astronaut Terry Virts spent months viewing baseball stadiums from far above earth. On the International Space Station, the Houses that Biggio and Jeter built looked like little dots.

While on his mission, Virts tried to photograph every stadium from the ISS during his time with the Endeavour mission STS 130 crew. Virts is back from his mission. On Sunday, he stood on the field at Minute Maid Park — not much bigger than a dot to those sitting in the upper deck. Then the latest American astronaut to come back from space threw out the first pitch on Star Wars Day.

Virts was presented with a jersey with No. 43 on the back, representing ISS Expedition 43 that Virts commanded.

The Houston Chronicle caught up with the man who grew up an Orioles fan but donned an Astros cap on Sunday:

Q. Is this the first time you've thrown out a first pitch?

A. Actually, I did one after my last flight, which was pretty amazing. It was on opening day (in Houston). It was a full house. It was a lot more stressful than anything I did in space.

Q. Have you practiced at all?

A. (My son and I) threw a few balls in the backyard this morning, so I got a little bit of warming up in.

Q. What's it like to be back on Earth?

A. It's like normal. It's like I re-adjusted in a few days and I'm back on Earth. It was really surprising to me how quickly I adjusted.

Q. What's it like coming out and throwing out the first pitch for a team that is in playoff contention?

A. It's so great. We came to a game last week. We had a celebration of the 2005 series. It was the 10 year anniversary. My son was five at the time and we came to so many games. It was so much fun coming to a playoff team with the stadium full and all the screaming and yelling. It's like that again. It's really, really cool. It's great for the city.

Q. What's something people should know about what you did up in space?

A. It's amazing to look back and see creation. Looking down on Earth, it's a surreal experience. That's your home planet but you're not there anymore.

Q. Did you end up taking capturing every baseball stadium from above?

A. I almost got every stadium. There were a couple that I didn't have a chance to double check with I got the stadium or not. I think I got all if not most.

Q. Are you going to have them hanging up in the house?

A. (Laughs). We'll see.

## **After run of hard luck on hard contact, Jed Lowrie has something big to show for it**

By: Evan Drellich / Houston Chronicle

Chatting in the Minute Maid Park dugout in the hours leading up to the Aug. 31 game when he broke out of his week-long slump, Jed Lowrie was adamant about one matter, despite what traditional numbers said.

He was firm on the same topic again Sunday morning in the Astros clubhouse, hours before he rocked a two-out, go-ahead grand slam in the seventh inning against the Twins, a shot that equally erupted the dugout and the Minute Maid Park crowd in an 8-5 Astros win.

"It was obviously emotional," Lowrie said after Sunday's rubber match.

His reaction to his slump was the opposite.

This whole stretch where the numbers are night and day — when he was in his 0-for-28 stretch and up through now, when he's 10-for-22 (.455) with three homers on a six-game hit streak — the third baseman said he was seeing the ball well. Hitting it hard.

He just wasn't getting any luck before this past week.

Sunday's homer came off rookie righty Trevor May to right field on an 86 mph hanging changeup, giving Lowrie two straight games with a long ball. The Astros were down 2-1.

"I mean, what's your definition of hitting the ball well?" Lowrie said Sunday morning.

"Hard," a reporter said.

"Just look at the numbers," Lowrie said. "You can't lie about it anymore. There's empirical data that proves, yes, I was consistently hitting the ball during that (0-for-28) streak."

It's common thing players will say when they're struggling: that their good swings weren't producing good luck. What Lowrie appreciates is that players no longer have to be taken on their word.

Lowrie himself looked at the numbers. He checked the MLB-published batted-ball velocities that are made easily searchable via BaseballSavant.com, a website built by Houston's own Daren Willman.

Per Willman, the average velocity on hits of any sort is 93.4 mph. From Aug. 21-29, a seven-game stretch that included most of his hitless run, Lowrie had a batted-ball velocity at 93 mph or above 10 times. He went 0-for-25 overall.

During those same days, Altuve had 11 rips at 93 mph or better. He went 11-for-30 overall.

Lowrie's hardest fruitless swing counted as a highlight for someone else. He ripped a ball 106 mph on Aug. 29 into the glove of diving Minnesota shortstop Eduardo Escobar at Target Field.

On Aug. 22 against the Dodgers, Lowrie put the ball in play at 94 mph, 95 mph and 96 mph respectively — all for outs.



"I love the fact that stuff like that is actually out," Lowrie said. "You can no longer hide behind, 'I'm seeing the ball well, hitting it.' You're actually, when you're talking to a reporter, you're talking to someone else, you can just go look."

Lowrie acknowledged that his biggest worry coming back from right-thumb surgery was bat speed. That's almost always the case for any injury involving the hand or wrist. He said he's talked to George Springer, who's coming back from a wrist injury, about the same subject.

"Veteran guy talking to a younger player," Lowrie said of the nature of the conversation. "I still think I'm making progress (with my hand), but I'm happy where it's at. I just think there's still room for improvement, but it's good."

It looks good, too.

Struggling against the curveball of rookie righty Tyler Duffey, the 'Stros trailed 2-0 until the batter before Lowrie, Jose Altuve, beat out an infield single with the bags full against another righty rookie, May.

Lowrie followed with the game-changer four pitches later.

"That was as an energized a dugout as you can imagine," manager A.J. Hinch said.

After Lowrie's grand slam in the seventh made it 5-2 Astros, the Astros tacked on three more runs in the eighth inning on a homer from Jake Marisnick, who entered the previous inning as a pinch-runner.

The insurance runs were valuable in the ninth, which brought Luke Gregerson into the game for the final out in place of Chad Qualls. Starter Dallas Keuchel struck out 12 in eight innings.

"September (and expanded rosters are) miserable on the defensive side because you can't get the match-up on the pitching side, but when you have those types of resources where you get Marisnick to pinch run as the tying run, he ends up coming up with a big at-bat," Hinch said. "He messes up the bunt. If you're going to mess up the bunt, it's required to hit a homer. And so he did that. And then obviously it paid dividends in the ninth when it got a little bit interesting."

Lowrie and Marisnick both have eight home runs. Marwin Gonzalez has nine. If all three can reach 10, the Astros will have 13 players with 10 or more home runs. The record for one team in a single season is 11, set by the 2004 Tigers.

## **Lowrie's grand slam helps Astros beat Twins, 8-5**

By: Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) - Jed Lowrie hit a grand slam in a five-run seventh inning and Dallas Keuchel became the American League's first 17-game winner as the Houston Astros rallied for a 8-5 victory over the Minnesota Twins on Sunday.

The Astros trailed by 1 when Lowrie hit his second career grand slam and his first since 2009 into the second row in right field off Trevor May (8-9) to make it 5-2. May dropped his head when Lowrie connected and shook it as he bounded around the bases and into a celebration at home plate.

Keuchel (17-6) improved to 13-0 at home this season and set a franchise record with his 14th straight win in Houston dating back to last season. He allowed five hits, three runs and struck out 12 in eight innings.

## **Elias Says...**

By: Elias Sports Bureau / ESPN.com

### **Keuchel ties modern major-league record**

Dallas Keuchel improved to 13-0 at Minute Maid Park with his win on Sunday afternoon and tied a modern major-league record for longest home winning streak to start a season. Three other pitchers won their first 13 home decisions of a season: Larry Benton of the Giants in 1928, Tex Hughson of the Red Sox in 1944 and Boo Ferris of the Red Sox in 1946.

### **Blue Jays batter O's and Tillman**

The Blue Jays battered the Orioles and Chris Tillman, 10-4, on Sunday afternoon. It was the 22nd time this season that the Blue Jays scored at least 10 runs in a game, the most for any team in one season since the 2011 Red Sox had 25 such games.

Chris Tillman has a 15.50 earned-run average in five starts against the Blue Jays this season. The only other pitchers who had an ERA that high against one team in one season (minimum: 4 starts) over the last 50 years were Doug Bird against the Expos in 1982 (15.92 in four starts) and Esteban Loaiza against the Devil Rays in 2002 (16.58 in five starts).

### **Nationals sweep Braves with a big broom**

The Nationals completed a four-game sweep of the Braves with an 8-4 win on Sunday afternoon. The Nationals outscored the Braves, 36-9, in the series, matching the second-largest run differential in a series of any length in Expos/Nationals franchise

history. The Expos outscored the Padres, 34-3, in a four-game sweep in 1994; and they dominated the Braves, 30-3, in a three-game sweep in 1981.

#### Cole contributes on both sides of the ball

Gerrit Cole earned a win at St. Louis by throwing seven scoreless innings and allowing only two hits. Cole also chipped in with the bat by providing an RBI single in the seventh inning. The last Pirates pitcher to earn a win allowing no runs and no more than two hits in an outing of seven-plus innings, and also knock in a run was Jim Bibby on May 19, 1981. Bibby threw a one-hit shutout against the Braves and had an RBI double at the plate.

#### Ellsbury 2-for-3 versus Archer

Jacoby Ellsbury went 2-for-3 against Chris Archer including a hit that started the four-run rally for the Yankees in their win over the Rays. Ellsbury is now hitting .667 against Archer in his career (14-for-21), the highest career batting average for any current batter with a minimum of 20 at-bats against any current pitcher.

#### Bruce hits homer No. 20

Jay Bruce slugged his 20th home run of the season in the Reds' win over the Brewers, marking the seventh season in which he has reached that plateau for the Reds. Only three players in Reds history have had more 20-homer seasons than Bruce, all Hall of Famers: Johnny Bench (11), Frank Robinson (10) and Tony Perez (8). Two other players, like Bruce, hit 20-plus homers in a season seven times for the Reds: Adam Dunn and George Foster.

#### Byrd is the word

Thirty-eight-year-old Marlon Byrd rapped out four hits in the Giants' win over the Rockies. Byrd is the oldest Giants player to record four hits in a game since Omar Vizquel did it at age 40 in September 2007.

#### Prado walks-off Mets again

Martin Prado drove in the winning run with a sacrifice fly in the bottom of the ninth inning in the Marlins' win over the Mets on Sunday, two days after he drove in the winning run with a double in the bottom of the eleventh in a win over the Mets. Only one other player in Marlins history had two walk-off RBIs in one series: Dave Berg had walk-off singles in wins over the Giants in consecutive games in August of 1999.

#### Ortiz hits home run #200 at Fenway

David Ortiz hit his 200th career home run at Fenway Park in Boston's win over Philadelphia. That's the most home runs for any active player at any major-league venue. Next on the list is Ryan Howard with 183 home runs at Citizens Bank Park.

#### E-Rod first since Dice-K

Eduardo Rodriguez threw seven solid innings in the Red Sox win over the Phillies. Rodriguez is 3-0 with a 1.73 earned-run average over his last four starts for the Sox, and he's the first Red Sox rookie to go 3-0 or better with an ERA that low over a four-start span since Daisuke Matsuzaka did it in 2007 (3-0, 0.62 ERA over four starts).

#### Lindor's two-run triple is a big hit

Francisco Lindor tripled in the first two runs of the game off Justin Verlander in the Indians' 4-0 win over the Tigers. Lindor is hitting .327 with runners in scoring position this season, the third-highest such average among American League rookies with at least 50 at-bats in those situations this season, behind Rusney Castillo (.396) and Devon Travis (.352).

#### Santiago excels versus the Rangers

Hector Santiago is 3-0 with a 1.48 earned-run average in five starts against the Rangers this season. Santiago is one of six starting pitchers to go 3-0 or better with an ERA under 1.50 against one team this season. The others are Felix Hernandez versus the Angels (3-0, 0.67), Tommy Milone versus the White Sox (3-0, 0.87), Michael Wacha versus the Reds (3-0, 0.89), David Price

## **Grizzlies shutout Bees; will face El Paso in the first round of the PCL Playoffs**

*Fresno also clinches the second-best overall record in all of Triple-A Baseball*

By: Fresno Grizzlies

FRESNO, Calif. - The Fresno Grizzlies (84-58) struck once again with the big inning and shutout the Salt Lake Bees (57-86) by a score of 7-0 on Sunday night in front of 8,198 fans at Chukchansi Park. It marked the ninth combined shutout by Fresno this season and the sixth since August 3rd. Starter Mike Hauschild tossed 6.0 scoreless frames, while Kevin Chapman, Jordan Jankowski and James Hoyt combined to throw 1.0 scoreless IP each.

PCL MVP Matt Duffy began the scoring when he launched his 20th home run of the season into the left field bleachers in the second. The solo blast by Duffy was backed up by four two-out runs that came across on a Tony Kemp two-run double and a two-run single by Tyler White. Duffy's homer made him the second Fresno player to record 20 home runs this season (other, Jon Singleton), while the 104 RBI leave him four shy from tying the franchise single-season record with one regular season game left to play.

Hauschild managed to work around three walks and six hits over six quality innings to keep Salt Lake off the board. The Bees went only 1-9 with runners in scoring position and grounded into two double plays. Fresno pitchers combined to pick up 13

strikeouts, while the Grizzlies hitters drew 10 combined walks. The quality start by Hauschild was his ninth in only 15 Triple-A starts.

Salt Lake and Fresno meet for the final game of the regular season on Monday morning at Chukchansi Park. Grizzlies' Brett Oberholtzer makes his first start since August 26th, while the Bees send lefty Tyler DeLoach to the mound. Super View tickets are available for \$1 at the Chukchansi Park Box Office, while random fans will be receive giveaways and other prizes throughout the game. First pitch is set for 11:05 AM, with gates opening at 10:05 AM.

Upon the conclusion of Monday's game, the Grizzlies will conduct a workout on Tuesday morning at Chukchansi Park (11 AM - Noon) in preparation for Game 1 of the PCL Pacific Conference Finals against the El Paso Chihuahuas (SD), which is scheduled for Wednesday, September 9th at 7:05 PM in Downtown Fresno at Chukchansi Park.

Dates and Times for the Playoff Series are below:

PCL Pacific Conference Finals

El Paso Chihuahuas (SD) vs. Fresno Grizzlies (HOU)

Game 1 - Wednesday, September 9th at Chukchansi Park (7:05 PM PT)

Game 2 - Thursday, September 10th at Chukchansi Park (7:05 PM PT)

Game 3 - Friday, September 11th at El Paso (Time TBA)

Game 4\* - Saturday, September 12th at El Paso (Time TBA)

Game 5\* - Sunday, September 13th at El Paso (Time TBA)

\*If Necessary

The winner of the best-of-five series will move onto the PCL Championship Best-of-Five to meet the winner of Oklahoma City and Round Rock.

## **Hooks Rout Missions for Win No. 88**

By: Corpus Christi Hooks

SAN ANTONIO - Corpus Christi erupted for five runs in the fifth and Kyle Westwood picked up his Texas League leading 11th victory Sunday night as the Hooks rolled to a 9-2 triumph over the Missions at Wolff Stadium.

Westwood (11-7), who tossed seven shutout innings Tuesday, pitched seven more Sunday. The damage occurred in the fifth on Taylor Lindsey's two-run home run to right field.

Gonzalo Sanudo closed out the game with two scoreless frames.

Hooks pitchers own a 1.88 ERA in the last six contests. The club has gone 5-1 during this stretch.

An error by Lindsey at second base opened the door to a pair of runs for Corpus Christi in the second. Jio Mier and Colin Moran bookended the uprising with doubles.

The Hooks (40-29, 88-51) sent 10 men to the plate in the fifth. Moran coaxed a bases-loaded walk and A.J. Reed followed with a two-run double. Two outs later, Mier plated Reed and Alfredo Gonzalez via a single up the middle, chasing Bryan Rodriguez (6-14) from the game.

Conrad Gregor capped the scoring in the ninth with his 10th home run of the year, a two-run shot to right off Cody Hebner.

The regular season finale is Monday at 2:05. Francis Martes (1-0, 5.06) draws the Labor Day start. San Antonio (29-40, 60-79) sends Stephen Kohlscheen (5-2, 2.74) to the hill.

## **Dominant Bostick bests Mavericks**

*Righty takes perfect game into 5th, fans career-high nine*

By: Spenser Smith / Lancaster JetHawks

LANCASTER, Calif. - Akeem Bostick delivered his best outing of the season to lift the JetHawks to a 5-1 win over the High Desert Mavericks on Sunday night at The Hangar.

Bostick (6-4) carried a perfect game into the fifth inning before allowing a one-out walk to Ronald Guzman and an infield single to Josh Altmann. Over eight innings, Bostick struck out a career-high nine batters and allowed just one run on three hits. The right-hander became the first JetHawks (75-64) pitcher of the season to pitch eight innings.

Chase McDonald drove in four Lancaster's five runs, including a three-run homer off Dakota Watts in the eighth inning, his 29th home run of the season.

In the bottom of the second inning, Ronnie Mitchell drew a one-out walk from Mavericks (77-62) starter David Perez (4-3). Mitchell advanced to second on a wild pitch and scored the game's first run on a Mott Hyde single to center field.

McDonald plated the JetHawks' second run in the sixth inning, scoring J.D. Davis from third on a bases-loaded fielder's choice grounder.

Perez received the loss for High Desert, despite yielding just two runs on six hits over six innings of work.

After McDonald's three-run homer extended Lancaster's lead to four runs in the eighth, Enrique Chavez took over in relief for the ninth. Chavez gave up three hits and induced a double play before Jordan Mills recorded the game's final out to earn the save.

The JetHawks will play for the series victory on Monday with first pitch scheduled for 5 p.m. The final game of the regular season will feature Christian Powell (3-2, 8.10) starting for Lancaster as Dallas Gallant (1-1, 5.56) pitches for the Mavericks.

## **Bandits pound season-high 19 hits in win at Beloit**

*Nick Tanielu, Ramon Laureano and Luis Reynoso each homer in 14-2 road victory*

By: Marco LaNave / Quad Cities River Bandits

BELOIT, Wis. - Quad Cities River Bandits center fielder Bobby Boyd, first baseman Bryan Muñiz and catcher Garrett Stubbs each had three hits, and all 10 Quad Cities River Bandits batters had at least one of the team's 19 hits - its most since 2012 - to become the first team in baseball to win 88 games, with a 14-2 victory over the Beloit Snappers at Pohlman Field Sunday afternoon.

River Bandits All-Star third baseman Nick Tanielu opened the scoring with a two-out, first-inning solo home run, and designated hitter Ramon Laureano and second baseman Luis Reynoso added sixth-inning home runs to carry Quad Cities (43-26 second half, 88-49 overall) to a 10-0 lead in support of right-hander Elieser Hernandez (3-3), who struck out six batters in 5 2/3 innings for his first win since Aug. 7.

Snappers right-hander Brett Graves (12-8) retired the game's first two batters before Tanielu swatted his sixth home run - and first since Aug. 8 - over the left-field wall for a 1-0 Quad Cities lead. In the third inning, Reynoso hit a leadoff single to center field, and Tanielu grounded a two-out RBI double down the third-base line. After Muñiz walked, right fielder Drew Ferguson lifted a fly-ball RBI double down the right-field line, and Laureano hit a fly-ball, two-run single into right field to make it 5-0. The first five runs came with two outs.

Hernandez kept Beloit without a hit until the fourth inning, when shortstop Mikey White hit a leadoff single down the third-base line. After walking left fielder Max Kuhn, Hernandez struck out the next three batters to strike out the side for the second straight inning.

Graves kept his team's deficit at 5-0 until the sixth inning, when Laureano led off with a home run to left-center field - his fourth of the season and first since July 4. Stubbs then singled to right field, and shortstop Kristian Trompiz reached on an infield single, before Graves was removed with no outs. On right-hander Rob Huber's first pitch, Reynoso launched a three-run home run over the left-field wall for his first home run since July 26, 2014, with rookie-level Greeneville. Graves was charged with the first eight earned runs on 11 hits and two walks with three strikeouts in five-plus innings. Two batters after Reynoso, Boyd lifted a one-out fly ball toward Kuhn, who missed the catch in left field, allowing Boyd to reach second base. Muñiz brought in Boyd with single to center field to make it 10-0.

In the bottom of the sixth inning, Hernandez walked center fielder Justin Higley, and White hit a double to left field. Hernandez allowed Kuhn's RBI groundout and third baseman Jose Brizuela's RBI double to left-center field before getting the second out, and left-hander Zach Davis got the final out of the inning to keep a 10-2 lead. Hernandez was charged with two earned runs on three hits and two walks.

Quad Cities added a pair of runs off Huber in the seventh inning, when Stubbs hit a one-out single to left-center field, Reynoso drew a two-out walk, left fielder Jason Martin hit an RBI single to center field, and Boyd grounded an RBI single down the third-base line off left-hander Mike Fagan to make it 12-2. In a two-run ninth inning against right-hander Koby Gauna, Martin drew a

one-out walk, Boyd singled to center field, third baseman Wander Franco grounded an RBI double down the first-base line, and Muñiz's RBI groundout made it 14-2.

After Davis went 2 1/3 scoreless innings, right-hander Eric Peterson worked around two singles in a scoreless ninth inning to end the game.

The River Bandits conclude the regular season at 2 p.m. Monday in Beloit. River Bandits right-hander Rogelio Armenteros (1-0) is scheduled to face Snappers right-hander Joey Wagman (8-4).

UP NEXT: Tickets are on sale at riverbandits.com and the Modern Woodmen Park box office for the River Bandits' first home playoff game Thursday, Sept. 10, at 7 p.m. against the Cedar Rapids Kernels. For all 2015 playoff home games, box seat tickets will be \$9 each, while all bleacher and general admission tickets will be \$5 each. Current ticket plan holders (12 games or more) receive free playoff tickets by making a \$100-per-seat renewal deposit toward a 2016 ticket package. Group area picnic pricing for 2015 playoff games is the same as regular season pricing, with full details at riverbandits.com/groups. Suite rentals, including 16 tickets per suite, are \$350 per game. Only tickets for the Sept. 10 game are available before the playoffs. Tickets for other possible playoff home games will be made available once the game becomes necessary. A full playoff schedule is available at riverbandits.com.

## **Tigers defeat ValleyCats 9-4**

By: Tri-City ValleyCats

TROY, NY - Richard Gonzalez went 3-for-3 with a double, and a run batted in, while Cesar Carrasco went 3-for-4 with two runs scored, but the Tri-City ValleyCats fell 9-4 to the Connecticut Tigers on Sunday evening, at Joseph L. Bruno Stadium.

One night after a 11-4 series-opening win over the Tigers, the 'Cats got on the board first on Sunday, when Johnny Sewald walked to lead off the bottom of the first frame, stole second base, then scored on a double by Kolbey Carpenter, putting Tri-City ahead 1-0.

That one run lead held until the top of the fifth frame, when Connecticut pushed five runs across, all with two outs. The Tigers also scored three runs in the eighth, and one in the ninth.

Tri-City didn't go down quietly, however, as Gonzalez drove home Carrasco with a sacrifice fly in the bottom of the seventh, and Pat Porter plated Brooks Marlow and Carrasco with a two-run double in the ninth frame.

Despite the loss, the ValleyCats' playoff positioning remained unaffected, since Saturday's 11-4 victory clinched the second seed in the New York-Penn League playoffs. However, Tri-City's first round opponent remains undecided.

As the winner of the Stedler Division, and holder of the number two seed, they will face the winner of the McNamara Division, which after Sunday's games, is led by Staten Island, who holds a 40-34 record.

The Aberdeen IronBirds, who defeated the Hudson Valley Renegades 4-0 on Sunday, finished the day a half-game behind the Yankees, with a 40-35 record.

If Staten Island defeats the Brooklyn Cyclones on Monday, they will clinch their division title, and face the ValleyCats in the semifinal series.

For Aberdeen to win the division, they would have to beat Hudson Valley on Monday, and have Staten Island lose to Brooklyn.

The ValleyCats will conclude their regular season slate, wrapping up this three-game set against Tigers with a 5 p.m., first pitch. On the mound for Tri-City will be RHP Jose Hernandez (0-0, 6.23), with LHP Toller Boardman (0-0, 1.50) getting the start for Connecticut.

## **Astros fall in championship series opener**

By: Nick Carey / Greeneville Astro

Greeneville, TN- The Greeneville Astros (2-2) lost 12-2 to the Princeton Rays (3-1) in the opening game of the Appalachian League Championship Series at Pioneer Park on Sunday night.

The Rays offense was potent throughout the matchup scoring all 12 runs in the first six innings. Princeton third baseman Brett Sullivan paced the Ray's bats with a 2-for-4 performance at the plate including a run scored and three RBI. Each batter in the Princeton lineup managed at least one hit in the 20-hit night by the Rays.

Greeneville countered with three multiple-hit batters accounting for all but one of the club's seven hits. Third baseman Randy Cesar led the Astros with 2-for-3 night at the plate featuring a double and run scored as right fielder Kyle Tucker finished the night 2-for-4 with a run. Catcher Christian Correa went 2-for-3 and drew a walk.

Astros right-hander Cristhopher Santamaria emerged from the bullpen to pitch three shutout innings, allowing only two hits and striking out two batters. Princeton's Spencer Moran earned the win for the Rays tossing five and two-third innings and allowing two runs on six hits and striking out five.

The series travels to Princeton, WV tomorrow night with a 7 PM scheduled first pitch for the second game and a third game, if necessary. The Astros will look to sweep the last two games of the series and earn the league championship in the same fashion as the advanced through the playoff series against Kingsport.

The Greeneville Astros are the Appalachian League affiliate of the Houston Astros. For more information call (423)-638-0411.

## **9/7/15 OPPONENT AT OAKLAND ATHLETICS**

### **A's pleased with Nolin's solid debut**

*Southpaw allows three runs over six innings in loss to Mariners*

By: Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Though Sean Nolin's A's debut ended in a 3-2 loss to the Mariners on Sunday, his employers got a six-inning glimpse of an arm that could prove effective in their rotation next year.

The left-handed Nolin, one of four players the A's reeled in from the Blue Jays for Josh Donaldson, was done in by a pair of costly walks in a three-run fifth -- he issued three overall and fanned one -- but impressed in his other five frames.

"I thought he threw the ball really well," manager Bob Melvin said. "Kept them off-balance, really not too many good swings, it was just the two walks that ended up costing him some runs."

The free passes, to Mariners No. 8 and 9 hitters Jesus Sucre and Shawn O'Malley, sandwiched a wild pitch that led to the first of three runs allowed by Nolin, who said, "I just rushed it a little bit, a slide-step curveball I didn't want to leave hanging. Just a bad bounce. It happens."

"The fifth inning wasn't the best," he said, "but overall, I was pretty happy with the day."

Nolin retired each of his first six batters, cruising through the heart of Seattle's order with ease, and he worked around three baserunners over the next two innings ahead of the fateful fifth, remaining in the game to complete six total on 85 pitches -- the most he's thrown since he tallied 102 on June 27 for Triple-A Nashville.

The southpaw appeared in just 14 games (12 starts) for the Sounds before his promotion because of his two separate injuries, and this marked the first time several members of the A's brass had seen him in game action since he arrived via trade, including Melvin.

He's expected to remain in the rotation the rest of the season.

"That's the deepest I've been in a game for a while," Nolin said. "I was definitely happy about it. I'm physically feeling good."

### **A's late rally not enough in series finale**

By: Jane Lee and Greg Johns / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Hisashi Iwakuma pitched 6 1/3 innings of one-run ball, helping Seattle secure a three-game series sweep over the A's with a 3-2 victory at the Coliseum on Sunday afternoon.

The Mariners, who put together a three-run fifth inning against left-hander Sean Nolin in his A's debut, finished their road trip, 7-3, and have won 10 of their last 14 overall. Oakland, meanwhile, has dropped five straight to fall to 58-79 -- more than 20 games under .500 for the first time since 1997.

The A's managed just five hits off Iwakuma, including a solo home run from Billy Butler in the seventh. The Mariners' right-hander picked up his seventh win of the season, lowering his ERA to 4.03.

"He didn't have his best velocity, but his command was real good," said Mariners manager Lloyd McClendon. "He hit his spots and did what he wanted to do. He made one bad pitch, he left a split up to Butler and he hit it out of the ballpark, but other than that, he was pretty good."

#### **MOMENTS THAT MATTERED**

Oh my, O'Malley: The Mariners scored three runs in the fifth off Nolin and Shawn O'Malley was in the middle of the rally with a walk and run scored as the September callup continued making things happen from the No. 9 spot in the lineup. O'Malley went 1-for-2 with a bunt single and the walk and is now 6-for-8 in three games with three walks for a tidy .833 (10-for-12) on-base percentage. Ketel Marte drove in the first run in the rally with a bases-loaded bloop single, Kyle Seager followed with a sacrifice fly and O'Malley scored on a wild pitch.

Two walks too many: Nolin was cruising through his first four innings, facing two over the minimum, before finding trouble in the fifth. Following consecutive hits to Logan Morrison and Brad Miller, back-to-back walks to Seattle's No. 8 and 9 hitters, along with a

wild pitch that brought in one of three runs in the inning, proved costly. Otherwise, Nolin impressed in his A's debut, flashing a good curveball and changeup to offset his fastball in the six-inning outing. The lefty, acquired in the Josh Donaldson deal, is the first A's pitcher to complete six innings since Felix Doubront did so on Monday.

"For a good portion of it, other than a couple at-bats where he had a couple walks, I thought he threw the ball really well," manager Bob Melvin said. "Kept them off-balance, really not too many good swings, it was just the two walks that ended up costing him some runs."

**Bullpen to the rescue:** The Mariners' relievers have been a sore spot much of the season, but Tony Zych -- pitching in his second big league game -- came through with two big outs in the seventh to preserve Iwakuma's 3-1 lead. He entered with runners on first and third and struck out Marcus Semien on a full-count slider and then got Billy Burns to fly to center, with O'Malley making a running catch to end the frame. After Logan Kensing allowed a run in the eighth, closer Tom Wilhelmsen came on with a runner on second and promptly retired Brett Lawrie and Butler to keep the score at 3-2 and then finished off the ninth for his eighth straight scoreless save.

"Obviously, you don't want to go 3-0 to the first batter you face," Wilhelmsen said of his key battle with Lawrie, who popped out on a 3-1 slider. "It's like, I've got all the confidence in the world with this and here's 3-0. Great. I'm just not in the mood for walking him right now. That's what I told myself and we were able to get him out." More >

#### SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

The win was the Mariners' fifth-straight, their longest streak since Sept. 2-6 last year.

#### QUOTEABLE

"It's great to see. The bats are coming on, the bullpen is starting to get a little sharper. We can't look back at what we've done, we just need to continue to look forward and keep this ball rolling." -- Wilhelmsen, on the five-game win streak

#### VOGT INJURED, BLAIR MAKES DEBUT

Carson Blair made his big league debut behind the plate in the top of the eighth inning following Stephen Vogt's sudden departure. Vogt took a foul tip to his groin area and walked off the field with a trainer by his side. Blair made his first career plate appearance in the bottom half of the inning, drawing a walk. More >

#### WHAT'S NEXT

**Mariners:** Left-hander Roenis Elias (4-7, 4.35) opens a four-game series against the Rangers at Safeco Field on Monday in a 3:40 p.m. PT Labor Day start. Elias will be making his third start since being recalled from Triple-A Tacoma. He was 2-1, 2.42 in four starts against Texas last year as a rookie, but has yet to face them this season.

**A's:** Left-hander Felix Doubront will be on the mound when the A's open a three-game series against the Astros in a 1:05 p.m. PT Labor Day matchup at the Coliseum on Monday. Doubront is 1-0 with a 3.28 ERA in five games, including three starts, with Oakland.

### **Vogt expected to miss time after being hit by foul**

*Catcher taken to hospital following Sunday's loss to the Mariners*

By: Jane Lee / MLB.com

**OAKLAND** -- A's catcher Stephen Vogt went down in a heap after taking a foul tip to the groin area Sunday afternoon and has been taken to a local hospital to undergo a series of tests.

Vogt, who was replaced behind the plate by Carson Blair -- making his big league debut -- in the eighth inning of the club's 3-2 loss to Seattle, is expected to be sidelined at least a few days, manager Bob Melvin said.

"If anything's fractured, it could be longer," Melvin said, "but we're hoping for the best. He was in pain, a lot of pain."

"It's terrible," Blair said. "I just saw his reaction. It hurts to see that."

Vogt's departure made for a somewhat subdued debut for Blair, who later received a hearty applause from the Coliseum crowd when he stepped to the plate in the bottom half of the frame for his first career plate appearance.

Blair appeared unfazed, drawing a six-pitch walk from Mariners right-hander Logan Kensing.

"I was trying to slow it down, not have everything speeding it up on me," said Blair, who had several family members in the stands, including stepfather Fred Stanley, former Yankees infielder and current Giants Director of Player Development. "Slow everything down, his delivery, the fastball, get something to hit, then he threw me five sliders or something, I think he was probably playing off my aggression."

It's been a long time coming for Blair, a 35th-round Draft pick by the Red Sox in 2008 who inked a Minor League deal with the A's in November. Before this season, which he split between Double-A Midland and Triple-A Nashville ahead of his Sept. 1 callup, Blair had played in just 17 games above the Class-A level.

"It's been a pretty cool journey," said the 25-year-old, who noted, "I've always done well when I've been ambushed in a game."

"That was probably helpful," he said. "I wasn't thinking going in too much. It's terrible the way it had to happen, you never want to see an important part of your team go down like that."

"Usually you're a little jumpy and antsy wanting to hit, and to be able to draw a walk off a guy who can be pretty tough on righties means he was processing everything," Melvin said. "There's a lot going on that can speed up your first big league game, and I thought he handled himself really well."

## **Reddick exits vs. Mariners with illness**

By: Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A's right fielder Josh Reddick departed Saturday's 8-3 loss to the Mariners after just two innings with an illness.

"We'll see how he's doing tomorrow," manager Bob Melvin said, "but enough to where he had to come out of the game, and it's tough to get him out of a game."

Reddick struck out in his only at-bat before being replaced in right field by Jason Pridie to begin the third inning. Pridie finished 0-for-2.

Oakland is home to a crowded outfield at the moment, but injuries to Coco Crisp (neck) and Sam Fuld (back), along with the latest news on Reddick, has opened opportunities for the likes of Pridie and youngsters Tyler Ladendorf and Jake Smolinski.

Ladendorf pinch-hit for Pridie in the ninth inning Saturday and singled, marking his first hit since being recalled from Triple-A Nashville on Tuesday. Smolinski started in left field and was hitless in three at-bats.