

Astros Daily Clips

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Astros undone by A's big fourth inning

By Jane Lee and Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's used a five-run fourth to back a strong seven-inning performance from right-hander Kendall Graveman in a 7-4 series-opening victory against the Astros at the Coliseum on Monday night.

Yonder Alonso's two-run, go-ahead single with two outs sparked the big inning, which saw Astros starter Mike Fiers depart two batters later. Fiers was responsible for six runs on five hits and three walks in 3 2/3 innings, striking out five in the loss.

"Two outs and two strikes and I think they sent eight hitters to the plate after that and we got beat by a big inning," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "It's frustrating because we had four or five walks in that inning. They kept putting up quality at-bats, we couldn't close the inning out and then they separated from us. It was tough to get back into it."

Graveman improved to 5-0 in his last nine starts, after allowing three runs (two earned) on seven hits -- including a solo home run by Marwin Gonzalez in the fifth -- and one walk with five strikeouts while throwing a career-high 112 pitches. A's left fielder Khris Davis collected his team-leading 23rd home run in the seventh.

"I've got confidence in the sinker," Graveman said. "I think everybody can tell, 'He's going to throw the sinker. He's going to throw it both sides of the plate,' and confidence in it means that I'm locating it better. I think that's been the biggest key right now. I'm locating the sinker, it has a little bit more velocity and still has good movement. I think that really has been able to get me deep in ballgames."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Alonso stays hot: Twice, Alonso delivered a key hit with two outs, finishing 2-for-4 to up his batting average to .322 over his last 38 games, after hitting just .210 in his first 52 games of American League play. Alonso came through with a game-tying double in the second inning before opening the floodgates in the fourth by way of a base hit that plated the first two runs of the eventful frame.

"He's swinging great," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "When you see him using the whole field, driving the ball to left-center field, that means he's tracking the ball really well."

Tempers flare in Astros dugout: Fiers was one strike away from a 1-2-3 fourth inning when he allowed the next five batters to reach, prompting Hinch to pull him. Fiers said something to Hinch on the mound, and they later exchanged words in the dugout. Center fielder Carlos Gomez and Fiers had to be separated by pitcher Doug Fister at the half-inning before Fiers and Hinch spent several minutes talking in the dugout. All five batters who reached against Fiers scored as the A's took a 6-2 lead.

"They were battling and I needed to get it done and I needed to make that pitch and get out of that inning," Fiers said. "It just kept extending and extending, and by the time I knew what was going on, I was out of there. Just a really meltdown of an inning for me, and I need to be better for this team."

Healy atones for error: A's third baseman Ryon Healy was charged with a throwing error in the fourth inning that led to an unearned run, but the rookie made up for it in the seventh by making an excellent diving play on a sharp ground ball from Gonzalez to help Graveman complete the inning and potentially save a run.

"He really looks comfortable at a position that he has not played all that long," Melvin said. "He looks like a fighter, whether it's his at-bats or whether it's going after ground balls. He isn't afraid to go into the hole between short and third and try to get a ball. Few games in, looks like he's got some tenacity to him."

QUOTABLE

"I just touch the ball and it goes. All I have to do is get ready on time and touch it." -- Davis

REPLAY CHALLENGE

Hinch won a challenge in the second inning, saving third baseman Luis Valbuena an error. Valbuena threw wide of first on a grounder hit by Davis, but replay showed first baseman Gonzalez made a swipe tag.

WHAT'S NEXT

Astros: Left-hander Dallas Keuchel gets the start for the Astros in Tuesday's 9:05 p.m. CT game against the A's at the Coliseum. He went 3-0 with a 2.78 ERA in his last five starts before the All-Star break, with a 1.18 WHIP. The Astros won all five of those starts.

A's: Left-hander Dillon Overton will be added to the active roster for a spot start against the Astros at the Coliseum on Tuesday, with first pitch set for 7:05 p.m. PT. Overton was 1-1 with an 11.42 ERA in two starts in his first big league stint last month.

Astros' emotions surge in loss to Oakland Fiers has words with manager, Gomez after departing game in fourth

By Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Astros starter Mike Fiers admitted his emotions got the best of him in the fourth inning of Monday's 7-4 loss to the A's at the Coliseum. The inning unraveled quickly on Fiers and led to dugout tiffs between Fiers and manager A.J. Hinch, then Fiers and outfielder Carlos Gomez.

After the game, everyone involved echoed the same tone, saying the highly charged emotions are proof how much the Astros care and they'll emerge stronger because of it. Fiers was one strike away from pitching a 1-2-3 fourth inning before he allowed the next five batters to reach, and all of them scored.

Fiers appeared to have words with Hinch on the mound, and it carried over to the dugout, where pitcher Doug Fister pushed Fiers away from the manager. At the end of the inning, Carlos Gomez -- Fiers' teammate in Milwaukee who was traded with him to Houston a year ago -- and Fiers had to be separated, again by Fister.

Television cameras later showed Fiers and Hinch having calmer conversations in the dugout during the next inning, and All-Star second baseman Jose Altuve had some words for Fiers as well.

"Being a competitive person out there, I want to stay in the game as long as I can," said Fiers, who allowed six runs in 3 2/3 innings. "A.J.'s got to do his job and I wasn't doing my job. He had to take me out and I'm never going to be happy with being taken out of a game, so we had a couple of words here and there and we smoothed it over. That's just how it is in a competitive game. Everyone wants to win so bad, sometimes it gets out of hand, but like I said, it's over, we're done with it and we're going to move on and play tomorrow."

Hinch downplayed the incident and said his "tight-knit" team will be fine.

"It's an emotional game," he said. "It's played by humans. I've never seen a pitcher happy to come out of a game, but the best interest of the 25 is always going to override the best interest of one. But it is what it is. It's a family environment and we keep a lot of things internal, and we'll deal with it internally. It's all competitive emotions that come out. It's an emotional game no matter what anybody tells you."

Fiers said Gomez told him he should have handled his issues with Hinch in the clubhouse -- and away from the TV cameras. Gomez said he cares about Fiers and his run-in with him was a matter of boys being boys.

"What do you expect when you're with 25 men for 190 days, every day?" he said. "Sometimes, when you're brothers, you have issues. It does not mean you don't love your brother. You love your brother. You have sometimes strong conversation. That's what happened. The thing is it makes you stronger, it makes more love. It's not like we're going to try to kill each other. You have some conversation and show we care and we're going to prove we're in the same boat. It's a tough game today."

Fiers called Gomez one of the leaders of the team and admitted his emotions got the best of him.

"I need to be more professional about what I'm doing out there on the field and when I'm coming out of the game," he said. "It is what it is. Me and A.J., it's fine. We're competitive people. He's got to do his job and I've got to do mine to stay in the game."

Former Cards exec sentenced in Astros database breach

By Matt Kelly and Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

Former Cardinals scouting director Chris Correa was sentenced to 46 months in prison by a federal judge on Monday for illegally accessing the Astros' player personnel database and email system.

In January, Correa pleaded guilty to five counts of unauthorized access of a protected computer from 2013 to at least December '14. Correa was promoted to St. Louis' director of baseball development in '14, but he was dismissed last July after allegations of the illegal conduct first surfaced.

Correa also must pay a fine of \$279,038 in restitution. He faced up to five years in prison on each count.

Astros general counsel Giles Kibbe, who was at the sentencing, said Correa breached "Ground Control" -- the team's internal database which stores contract information, scouting reports and other stats and proprietary information -- 60 times between March 2013 and June 2014. Some of the information, including confidential trade talks, wound up being made public on Deadspin.com.

"It's a long sentence, but the judge said it was a very serious crime, and he did it repeatedly over a long period of time," Kibbe said. "He had an opportunity to look at everything we had for a long period of time and use that information to assist him in his job with the Cardinals. So it's obviously a very serious offense and a pretty rough day for baseball."

In a letter that Correa read publicly before the court, the former executive admitted he was "overwhelmed with remorse and regret for my actions."

"I violated my values, and it was wrong; I behaved shamefully," Correa said. "The whole episode represents the worst thing I've done in my life by far."

Correa was hired by Jeff Luhnow when the Astros' general manager worked for the Cardinals. Luhnow left the Cardinals for the Astros in December 2011 to become the GM. Cardinals chairman Bill DeWitt Jr. issued a public statement immediately following the sentencing on Monday afternoon.

"While today's sentencing of Chris Correa marks the end of the government's investigation, we also understand that the Office of the Commissioner of Baseball will now conduct its own investigation of this matter," the statement read. "As we did with the government during its investigation, we intend to fully cooperate with the Commissioner's Office in connection with its investigation so that this matter can finally be resolved.

"Pending the outcome of the Commissioner's investigation, we will have no further comment."

The Commissioner's Office previously stated that it would wait to gather details from federal authorities before launching its own investigation. Federal prosecutors stated that the breach cost the Houston organization about \$1.7 million, based upon how Correa used the Astros' data to draft players.

"I wouldn't say we're happy," Kibbe said. "It's sad to see somebody's life changed the way it changed today. Obviously, we're upset about what he did and breaking into our system and using our information and then disclosing it publicly to intentionally harm us. It doesn't make us happy to see somebody go to jail for four years."

Any possible action by the Office of the Commissioner remains to be seen.

"The Commissioner is conducting an investigation into this, and he's going to do whatever he needs to do to feel comfortable that he knows everything that he needs to know, and we have full faith in him addressing this appropriately," Kibbe said. "As to specifically what he does, we'll leave it to the Commissioner and let him decide, and whatever he decides is fine with us."

Keuchel seeking another strong start vs. A's

By Mark Chiarelli / MLB.com

Dallas Keuchel makes his first start since the All-Star break Tuesday when the Astros face the A's at the Coliseum, and if it's similar to his most recent outing, Houston's ace will begin the second half on the right foot.

Keuchel faced Oakland on July 10 and delivered a strong punctuation to an otherwise lacking first half, allowing one run and striking out five over seven innings in a 2-1 win. The reigning American League Cy Young winner is 6-9 with a 4.80 ERA in 19 starts, but he was 3-0 with a 2.78 ERA in five starts prior to the All-Star break.

Houston manager A.J. Hinch said Keuchel's been more efficient.

"It's mostly about command and control with him. When he repeats his delivery and can make the ball do whatever he wants, he's as efficient and as good as anybody in the league," Hinch said. "That's why he won the Cy Young. The execution part of his game has taken a nice leap forward."

Keuchel's struggled on the road this year, going 4-6 with a 5.50 ERA in 11 road starts, and he's never won at the Coliseum despite posting a 3.03 ERA in five career appearances.

The A's will counter with their own lefty, rookie Dillon Overton, whom they will recall from Triple-A Nashville for a spot start, taking Sean Manaea's scheduled turn in the rotation after Manaea threw five innings of emergency relief Sunday.

Overton's 1-1 with an 11.42 ERA in two starts with Oakland, and Tuesday marks his second stint in the Majors. He lasted just three innings in his most recent start June 30 against the Giants, giving up eight runs on eight hits. He's 10-4 with a 2.98 ERA in 16 games (15 starts) in Triple-A, and A's manager Bob Melvin said Overton's been on the team's radar all year.

"He's been pretty consistent all year," Melvin said. "It's good he'll get an opportunity. Obviously the reason for it is not great, but this is a guy we talked about in Spring Training and we felt like at some point in time he'd get an opportunity."

Things to know about this game

- Jose Altuve singled Monday to extend his road hitting streak to 17 games and road on-base streak to 33 games. He entered Monday hitting .404 on the road, but was hitting just .194 against the A's this year.
- Overton's allowed only three homers in 96 2/3 innings in the hitter-friendly Pacific Coast League, but has given up five in 8 2/3 innings in the Majors.
- Several A's hitters have enjoyed success against Keuchel, with Marcus Semien (.400) and Jed Lowrie (.346) posting high averages against the lefty. Danny Valencia sports the best numbers, however, going 7-for-13 (.538) with two homers in 16 plate appearances.

Bregman among top prospect performers Monday

By Mike Rosenbaum / MLB.com

- Another day, another multi-hit game for Alex Bregman. After pounding out three more hits for Triple-A Fresno in an 8-1 win against Round Rock, the No. 18 overall prospect (Astros' No. 1) owns a .362 average with 21 hits -- including six homers and five doubles -- through his first 13 games for the Grizzlies. He also picked up his first two Triple-A stolen bases in the contest.

Astros plan to be involved in trade market

By Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Astros general manager Jeff Luhnow said Monday "there's a good chance" he will be able to make a trade prior to the Aug. 1 non-waiver Trade Deadline, but said there's no urgency to do so. Luhnow didn't say what the Astros are targeting, but starting pitching and left-handed relief pitching are their biggest needs.

What Luhnow has to weigh over the next couple of weeks is whether there's an arm on the market that would be an upgrade over what they have now, and at what price? Dallas Keuchel, Collin McHugh, Lance McCullers and Doug Fister are entrenched in the rotation, and Mike Fiers has pitched better of late.

"We're having discussions with several teams about the players that may be available and talking about some of our players that would be required in return," Luhnow said. "Those are happening. There's no real sense of urgency on our part necessarily, but as teams pick up the pace, we're certainly going to be involved in the conversations."

Luhnow said when it comes to acquiring starting pitching, the target would be a pitcher who's healthy and pitching well and would fit into a possible playoff rotation.

"That's the bar we're using," he said. "And then if you clear that bar, you have to give something up to get a pitcher like that, so we'll think about it. We've done it before and we'll be prepared to do it again."

Tony Sipp has been the Astros' only left-handed reliever all season, but he hasn't been as effective this year as he was last year. The Astros last year traded for lefty Oliver Perez after the non-waiver deadline and would like a second lefty option. Andrew Miller or Will Smith could be potential targets.

"There might be some of those opportunities available," Luhnow said. "Our 'pen has been so good this year I don't feel there's necessarily a sense of urgency, but you think about the type of left-handed hitters we may face in the playoffs, having an extra left-handed arm that we have confidence in and experience in those situations is something we could benefit from."

- Luhnow said Cuban infielder Yulieski Gurriel, who was signed Saturday, is scheduled to report to the team's facility in Kissimmee, Fla., on Wednesday and will continue to work out until his work visa is obtained. That could take a couple of weeks, but he can't play in games until it's obtained.
- When asked when top prospect Alex Bregman could join the Astros, Luhnow said: "Suffice it to say, there are multiple players on that Triple-A roster that, if we had an opening, would be up if they can help our club, and Bregman is among those. He's worked himself in that situation more quickly than most players."

Bregman has played only shortstop so far at Triple-A Fresno after working some at third base at Double-A Corpus Christi, and Luhnow said he would play at other positions soon.

Series of disputes involving Mike Fiers enliven Astros' loss

By Angel Verdejo Jr. / Houston Chronicle

OAKLAND, Calif. - One out.

Just one out.

That's all Mike Fiers needed in the fourth inning. He had a lead and already gave up a two-out run earlier Monday against the Athletics.

He never got it and that was just part of the fireworks that occurred between the fourth and fifth innings in a 7-4 loss for the Astros at the Oakland Coliseum to start a three-game series.

The Athletics, who scored all their runs with two outs, sent 11 batters to the plate in the fourth. Eight of them reached and five scored. Fiers faced seven in the inning before his night was over.

"It sucks to lose it because of one inning," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said.

Said Fiers: "I needed to make that pitch and get out of that inning. The inning just kept extending (and) extending, and by the time I knew what was going on, I was out of there."

When the sequence of events was over, Fiers and Hinch were having a lengthy discussion in the dugout after the two exchanged words on the mound and in the dugout.

And it wasn't just between the two - players had to get between Carlos Gomez and Fiers in the dugout after the fourth inning. Jose Altuve said a few words while Hinch and Fiers were talking on the bench.

"It's an emotional game," Hinch said. "It's played by humans and I've never seen a pitcher want to come out of the game but the best interest of 25 is always going to override the best interest of one."

"But it is what it is - it's a family environment. We keep a lot of things internal and we deal with it internally. It's an emotional game, no matter what anybody tells you."

Added Altuve: "All 30 teams in the big leagues at some point, are going to have this kind of little thing. I called them that - little things - because it was just 20 seconds of little altercation but beyond that, we're all good. We're a good team and we have to keep everybody on the same page."

What got the Astros there was another subpar night from Fiers, who lasted 3 2/3 innings and allowed five straight Athletics to reach with two outs in the fourth exiting. That's now three starts in his last four in which Fiers has been unable to reach the fifth inning.

Fiers struck out three straight in the first before the Athletics tied it on a Yonder Alonso second-inning RBI double. Fiers caught a break when Gomez tracked down a Ryon Healy drive to the wall, making a leaping catch to end the inning.

After two quick outs in the fourth, the next five reached. Alonso scored Steven Vogt (double) and Marcus Semien (walk) with an RBI single, and came around on a Ryon Healy double to make it 4-2. That prompted the first of three mound visits in the inning by Hinch or pitching coach Brent Strom.

Fiers then walked Coco Crisp and Hinch went to get him. The righthander, who's gone back and forth between solid starts (no earned runs June 19 and July 1, and just one June 1) and rough outings (seven earned runs May 27 and four each June 6 and July 6), said a few extra words after Hinch took the ball.

"I need to better for this team," Fiers said.

It spilled over in the dugout, with Dallas Keuchel and Doug Fister at one point getting between Fiers and Hinch.

It also didn't get any better on the field.

Michael Feliz walked the first three batters he faced, loading the bases with the first pushing across runs with the next two.

Chris Davis, who homered in the seventh, flied out to end a dreadful inning. It also started more fireworks in the dugout when players and coaches had to get between Gomez and Fiers.

"What do you expect when you have 25 men for 190 days and you see them every day?" Gomez said. "Sometimes, when you're brothers, you have issues. That's doesn't mean you don't love your brother."

The Astros, who came in 9-2 on the road, led twice. A Colby Rasmus sacrifice fly started the scoring and Correa, who doubled twice, came around on a Gomez infield single. Marwin Gonzalez added his second home run in four days.

The Astros (50-43) at least didn't lose any ground in the American League West. The Rangers (55-39) lost to keep their division lead at five games.

Edict about arguing draws criticism from Astros

By Angel Verdejo Jr. / Houston Chronicle

OAKLAND, Calif. - As Ken Giles put it, players can't always say everything they want on the field.

So despite Major League Baseball's sending a memo to its managers and general managers Friday, telling the skippers to cool it in regard to arguing balls and strikes and "highly inappropriate conduct," players see a need for what their managers do.

"The manager is basically our voice to the umpires, because we need to stay in the game," Giles said. "We're there to play the game. We're the ones that win or lose, so being able to see our manager go out there and be our voice and showing our frustration toward what we're not pleased with is a great thing.

"It's one of those where we're not trying to disrespect anybody. But we're just like everybody else where everybody needs to step up their game one way or another."

Do as I say, not as I did

The memo was sent by MLB executive Joe Torre, a Hall of Fame manager who was ejected 66 times during his 29 seasons. Now the game's Chief Baseball Officer, Torre issued a memo that read in part: "This highly inappropriate conduct is detrimental to the game and must stop immediately."

It stated managers are increasingly relying on technology and then arguing from the dugout. Every pitch and play is monitored in case managers want to challenge or ask for a replay review. The thought is teams are now using the ability to check on every pitch, which may take away from the game itself.

"I still think you should trust your eyes more than you should trust the phone call," said Astros manager A.J. Hinch, who has been ejected twice this season, once for arguing balls and strikes. "If I'm ever going to chirp about a ball or a strike, it was nothing to do with the phone call we get. It has everything to do with how our hitter responds, how the catcher catches the ball, the umpire.

"I've watched enough baseball to not need a phone call to know whether or not I think a ball is a ball or a strike it a strike."

Not every ejection is the same, however, which might have in part led to the memo.

In May, Tigers skipper Brad Ausmus was ejected. He then took off his hooded sweatshirt and covered the plate with it. Ausmus also threw his hat as he walked off the field.

Big Papi pops off

A week earlier, Boston's John Farrell was ejected alongside David Ortiz against the Yankees in a scene that ended with Farrell having to restrain his designated hitter after an animated argument with plate umpire Ron Kulpa.

Discipline and fines could be on tap if the behavior continues, the memo stated.

"I understand the integrity of the game and the integrity of the umpires," said Hinch, who has four ejections in his two seasons as the Astros' manager. "They're doing their best back there, but this game is full of emotion. We see it every day out of players, out of managers, out of coaches, out of umpires.

"I would hate to take away some emotional reactions that are necessary and needed in order for us to function. I don't want to take the human element out of the strike zone. I don't want to take the arguing out of the game either."

It's a notion Hinch's players appreciate.

"You like having a manager who's going to stand up for you, and you respect that," A.J. Reed said. "I've had managers who haven't, and I've have managers who do, and you definitely respect your manager who stands up for you more. That's always nice to have.

"(Otherwise) you have to do more for yourself and stand up for yourself because you feel like nobody's got your back."

Astros report: A.J. Reed tries to make most of sporadic playing time

By: Angel Verdejo Jr. / Houston Chronicle

OAKLAND, Calif. - A.J. Reed's playing time has been more hit-and-miss recently, but the 23-year-old rookie was in Monday's lineup against Oakland righthander Kendall Graveman

Reed was the designated hitter for the second time in three days. He pinch-hit Sunday, drawing a walk.

The numbers show he's struggling: Reed entered Monday hitting .158 with 17 strikeouts. But in one small sign of progress, Reed hadn't had multiple strikeouts in a game since July 5.

"He's not getting the consistent playing time that he will get in this league, but it's mostly about pitch selection," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "I thought that walk he got (Sunday) is a good sign. He comes off the bench, faces a righty, takes a couple borderline pitches, and ends up with a walk. That's a step in the right direction."

Part of the learning curve involves Reed's seeing pitchers he has never faced.

"I think pitch selection is important for him," Hinch said. "When you're numbers get low, especially when you first get to the league, you start chasing pitches, chasing hits (and) chasing home runs. He's a little pull conscious, so I think all those adjustments slow down as the experience comes."

etting consistent at-bats has proved tough with the string of lefthanders the Astros have seen.

Reed had reached in three of his last four games entering Monday, getting a pair of singles to go with Sunday's walk.

"I'm starting to put the barrel on the ball a little bit more, so confidence is there. So it's just going out there and trying to have good at-bats."

Versatility is a bullpen virtue

When the Mariners scored in the eighth inning Sunday, the Astros bullpen saw its scoreless streak end at 16 innings. The group hadn't allowed a run since July 8.

"Collectively, that's the goal every time we go out there," Chris Devenski said of wanting to put up scoreless innings. "Stuff isn't going to go your way all the time, but you have to push through it and find a way to get it done."

The Astros have the American League's best bullpen ERA since May 1 (2.58). That includes All-Star Will Harris (1.62 ERA), who has assumed the closer's role and entered Monday a perfect 9-for-9 in save chances.

The bullpen's strength is its members' ability to fill multiple roles. Five pitchers have notched saves. Devenski, Scott Feldman and Michael Feliz are valuable in throwing multiple innings but also filling in late if Harris, Luke Gregerson or Ken Giles has thrown multiple days in a row.

Tony Sipp, the lone lefthander in the bullpen, has rebounded from a stretch of allowing six earned runs in four outings. Since then, he hasn't allowed an earned run in four appearances.

"That's the biggest thing - we're all on the same page," said Giles, who has 26 scoreless outings in his last 31. "We're not being separated from roles or anything like that. So if somebody comes in, there's a reason for it. That's to get the job done.

"And with anybody in the bullpen, we believe that they're going in there and they're going to get the job done no matter what the situation may be."

MLB subject to FOIA protocol

Major League Baseball hopes to obtain information from law enforcement officials to help determine the extent to which the Cardinals should be disciplined in regard to the Christopher Correa case.

In January, federal prosecutors set at \$1.7 million the property loss to the Astros for the five incursions into their database to which Correa pleaded guilty. However, with the disclosure Monday that Correa made at least 60 incursions, the Astros could argue they were damaged to the tune of \$15 million to \$20 million.

MLB has not conducted its own investigation, so without details, it would be difficult to explore further what Correa meant when he told colleagues what he found in the Astros' computer network. U.S. Attorney Kenneth Magidson said Monday that MLB must go through the same procedure as the public to obtain those details.

"We will listen to any request," Magidson said after Correa was sentenced to 46 months in prison for intruding into the Astros' database. "There is a Freedom of Information Act, which is the normal way you obtain information from the United States. But we always put our files together, and the FBI does, with only one purpose in mind, and that's to determine whether a crime was committed."

Asked if MLB had contacted his office, Magidson said, "They can contact us all they want, but we will follow the law and rules regarding the disclosure of any information."

Asked if that meant MLB would have to file a Freedom of Information Act request, he added, "Of course. Just like everybody else."

Odds and ends

The Astros will stick with their rotation despite a day off Thursday before facing the Angels. Lance McCullers will start Friday, followed by Collin McHugh and Mike Fiers ... Lefty Dillon Overton will make a spot start for the Athletics on Tuesday, getting recalled from Class AAA Nashville. Previously scheduled starter Sean Manaea pitched five innings in an emergency role Sunday. ... The rookie level Greenville Astros won Sunday in 20 innings, beating the Bluefield Blue Jays 5-4 in a game that lasted 6 hours and 31 minutes.

While you were sleeping: Astros yelled at each other a lot

By Matt Young / Houston Chronicle

The Astros are known for having a tight-knit clubhouse. However, some of that appeared to come apart at the seams Monday night in Oakland.

When the Astros had a disastrous fourth inning with the Athletics scoring five times and sending 11 men to the plate, starting pitcher Mike Fiers showed his frustration. Although he was one out - and one strike, at times - from getting out of the jam, Fiers never escaped and when manager A.J. Hinch came to pull him from the game, Fiers had some words for his manager and appeared to linger on the mound a little longer than usual.

Then, cameras caught a more animated Fiers exchanging more words with Hinch in the dugout after Michael Feliz had entered the game as his replacement.

Although it wasn't shown on the Houston broadcast, Oakland cameras caught Astros center fielder Carlos Gomez, who came over with Fiers in a trade with Milwaukee last season, yelling at Fiers in the dugout.

By the time the game was over and the Astros had lost 7-4 thanks to that one big Oakland inning, cooler heads had prevailed.

"It's an emotional game," Hinch said. "It's played by humans and I've never seen a pitcher want to come out of the game but the best interest of 25 is always going to override the best interest of one.

"But it is what it is - it's a family environment. We keep a lot of things internal and we deal with it internally. It's an emotional game, no matter what anybody tells you."

Fiers also said he had no problem with what happened with Gomez in the dugout and took full responsibility for the situation.

"He's one of the leaders of this team. He doesn't want to see that ... I can't show that much emotion in the dugout," Fiers said. "He was just letting me know that if I had to say something, take it inside and do it without anybody watching, which he's right. My emotions got the best of me. I need to be more professional about what I'm doing out there, both on the field and when I'm coming out of the game."

Gomez also said the inning will be put behind them.

"What do you expect when you have 25 men for 190 days and you see them every day?" Gomez said. "Sometimes, when you're brothers, you have issues. That's doesn't mean you don't love your brother."

Astros bullpen's strength is versatility

By Angel Verdejo Jr. / Houston Chronicle

When the Mariners scored in the eighth inning Sunday, the Astros bullpen finally saw their scoreless streak end at 16 ⅓ consecutive innings.

The group hadn't allowed a run since July 8.

"Collectively, that's the goal every time we go out there," Chris Devenski said of wanting to put up scoreless innings. "It's baseball. Stuff isn't going to go your way all the time, but you have to push through it and find a way to get it done."

The bullpen has the American League's best ERA since May 1 (2.58). That includes All-Star Will Harris (1.62 ERA), who has assumed the closer's role and entered Monday a perfect 9 for 9 in save chances.

The group strength is players are able to fill into multiple roles. Five different pitchers have notched saves. Devenski, Scott Feldman and Michael Feliz are valuable in throwing multiple innings, but also filling in late if Harris, Luke Gregerson or Ken Giles has thrown over multiple days.

Tony Sipp, the lone lefthander in the bullpen, has rebounded from a stretch of allowing six earned runs in four outings. Since then, he hasn't allowed an earned run in four appearances.

"That's the biggest thing - we're all on the same page," said Giles, who has 26 scoreless outings in his last 31. "We're not being separated from roles or anything like that. So if somebody comes in, there's a reason for it. That's to get the job done."

"And with anybody in the bullpen, we believe that they're going in there and they're going to get the job done no matter what the situation may be."

MLB to investigate if Cardinals should be punished in Christopher Correa hacking case

By: David Barron / Houston Chronicle

Major League Baseball hopes to obtain information from law enforcement officials to help determine the extent to which the Cardinals should be disciplined in regard to the Christopher Correa case.

In January, federal prosecutors set at \$1.7 million the property loss to the Astros for the five incursions into their database to which Correa pleaded guilty. However, with the disclosure Monday that Correa made at least 60 incursions, the Astros could argue they were damaged to the tune of \$15 million to \$20 million.

MLB has not conducted its own investigation, so without details, it would be difficult to explore further what Correa meant when he told colleagues what he found in the Astros' computer network. U.S. Attorney Kenneth Magidson said Monday that MLB must go through the same procedure as the public to obtain those details.

"We will listen to any request," Magidson said after Correa was sentenced to 46 months in prison for intruding into the Astros' database. "There is a Freedom of Information Act, which is the normal way you obtain information from the United States. But we always put our files together, and the FBI does, with only one purpose in mind, and that's to determine whether a crime was committed."

Asked if MLB had contacted his office, Magidson said, "They can contact us all they want, but we will follow the law and rules the regarding the disclosure of any information."

Asked if that meant MLB would have to file a Freedom of Information Act request, he added, "Of course. Just like everybody else."

Ex-Cardinal executive gets stiff sentence for hacking Astros

By: David Barron / Houston Chronicle

Former St. Louis Cardinals executive Christopher Correa was sentenced Monday to 46 months in prison for illegal incursions into the Astros' computer database, wrapping up a case of sports-related cybercrime that a federal judge summed up as plain, old-fashioned theft.

Correa, 35, will report within two to six weeks to begin his sentence imposed by U.S. District Judge Lynn Hughes, who accepted the government's recommended sentence in the wake of Correa's guilty plea in January to five counts of illegal access to a protected computer.

Now the case moves into the hands of Major League Baseball, where commissioner Rob Manfred will decide if the Cardinals will face sanctions because of Correa's actions in 2013 and 2014.

Manfred also might be asked to consider a heretofore undisclosed element: that Correa intruded into the Astros' system 60 times on 35 days, far more the five reported cases to which he pleaded guilty, according to an Astros official.

Correa, who was the Cardinals' director of baseball development, was alternately counseled and lectured by Hughes before a crowded courtroom that included several members of his family.

As Correa read a letter apologizing to the court, the Astros and his family, Hughes told him to face his family and "look at them when you say that. Don't tell me."

"I apologize to my family for the pain and suffering I've caused," Correa said. "I will work hard to regain your trust. I stand before you a different person than the one who committed the crime."

But even as Correa admitted his wrongdoing, Hughes interjected his own descriptions of the defendant's actions: "intentionally, over a long period of time, stupidly."

Hughes also addressed Correa's contention at the January plea hearing that he accessed the Astros' player database because he suspected the Astros possessed information proprietary to the Cardinals.

"There was discussion about what a bunch of awful people the Astros are, and all that well could be true," Hughes said. "But you're back to middle school when the teacher said, 'Did you throw that eraser?' and you said, 'Bobby did, too.'"

"I hope it didn't work then, because it's not going to work now."

In his letter read to the court, Correa was contrite and apologetic and did not address his previous allegations about the Astros.

"I broke the law. I violated my values, and it was wrong," he said. "I behaved shamefully. This episode represents the worst thing I have done in my life by far ... and I am overwhelmed with remorse and regret."

Hughes said the victim in this case is "trust in American society" and compared Correa to one who falsifies medical records or uses cybercrime to clean out bank accounts.

He said cybercrime "makes it harder for honest people to go about their daily lives, and I'm not talking about people like (Astros owner Jim Crane) and the big shots. A lot of peoples' lives are adversely affected by the additional cost it takes to defend themselves against people like you."

Hughes told Correa to "make some sound choices" and avoid jealousy, anger, lust, envy - "all those things that are why people do things they shouldn't do. Get those under control."

Houston attorney and former prosecutor Philip Hilder, who predicted Correa would face as much as four years in prison, based on federal sentencing guidelines, said the actual 46-month term was higher than he expected for a first-time offender.

"It is within the guideline range but a bit higher than anticipated for a first-time offender," Hilder said. "Usually, a defendant in a similar situation would receive a sentence on the lower end of the range, but here a bit more time was given in order to use this as a teachable anti-hacking lesson that will act as a deterrence to others. This being a high-profile case worked against Mr. Correa."

U.S. Attorney Kenneth Magidson said he was pleased with length of the sentence. Correa could have been sentenced to a maximum of five years in prison on each count, although prosecutors agreed in return for his guilty plea that sentences would be served concurrently.

"This is a serious federal crime," Magidson said. "It involves computer crime, cybercrime. We in the U.S. Attorney's Office look to all crimes that are being committed by computers to gain an unfair advantage. ... This is a very serious offense, and obviously, the court saw it as well."

Correa's attorney, David Adler of Houston, had no comment on the sentence.

Astros general counsel Giles Kibbe, who also attended the hearing, described Monday as a "sad day for baseball" and emphasized that the Astros were the victims of Correa's unauthorized access into a computer database that included scouting reports and other information.

Referring to Correa's statements in January, he added, "I don't know what Mr. Correa saw in our system or what he thinks he saw in our system, but what I can tell you is that the Astros were not using Cardinals proprietary information."

Kibbe, for the first time, also acknowledged that Correa's intrusions into the Astros' computer system were more frequent than the instances set out in the information to which he pleaded guilty - 60 intrusions over 35 days, he said, from March 2013 through June 2014.

In addition to prison time, Correa also faces two years of supervised release and a fine of about \$279,000.

What Chris Correa's hacking case sentencing means for Cardinals

By: Mark Saxon / ESPN

ST. LOUIS – Major League Baseball has put the St. Louis Cardinals on the clock.

Now that former scouting director Chris Correa has been sentenced to nearly four years in prison for illegally accessing the Houston Astros' data, the league has said that it will decide as quickly as possible whether the team should be punished.

Commissioner Rob Manfred's office said it now is turning the matter over to its investigation arm, saying Monday that it plans to "conduct a complete investigation of the facts in this matter, including requesting information from the appropriate law enforcement authorities. The commissioner hopes that the investigation can be completed promptly and put him in a position to take appropriate action."

Nobody really knows what such "appropriate action" would look like, though speculation seems to be that it could include fines, limiting the money the team spends on signing young players or confiscating one or even multiple draft picks.

Correa was sentenced in federal court Monday to 46 months in prison six months after he pleaded guilty to five counts of unauthorized access to a protected computer. Correa also will be under two years' supervised release and be on the hook for restitution payments of \$279,038.65.

The Cardinals aren't saying much, which comes as no surprise as an active investigation is still underway.

"As we did with the government during its investigation, we intend to fully cooperate with the Commissioner's Office in connection with its investigation so that this matter can finally be resolved," Cardinals chairman and CEO Bill DeWitt Jr. said in a statement. "Pending the outcome of the commissioner's investigation, we will have no further comment."

The criminal investigation took more than 13 months, so most expect the commissioner's people to take at least a month to gather facts and hand them over to Manfred to determine the Cardinals' punishment, if there is any. There has already been speculation that the harsh penalties he handed down to the Boston Red Sox -- voiding existing contracts and barring the team from signing international prospects -- sets a bad precedent for the Cardinals.

Manfred tried to quash some of that talk when he addressed members of the Baseball Writers Association of America at the All-Star game.

"I do not see a great parallel between the Red Sox situation and the St. Louis situation, principally for these reasons: The Red Sox, to their credit, accepted organization responsibility for what went on," Manfred said. "We don't have all of the facts in the St. Louis-Houston situation. To date, there has been no implication that this was an organizational problem but there has been an indication that it was one employee [who] did something inappropriate, the organization found out about it, and fired the employee. Those are very, very different things."

Though the facts that come from the government could alter his thinking, Manfred's comments seem to indicate he agrees with DeWitt -- who is viewed as an influential owner in Manfred's regime -- when he called Correa's actions "roguish behavior." That could mean the Cardinals will get off lightly.

Then again, only a few really know where this is headed, but many have a stake in where it ends up.

Graveman wins 5th straight to pace Athletics past Astros 7-4

By: Michael Wagaman / Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — With three wins in four games since the All-Star break against two of the hottest teams in the majors, the Athletics are building some momentum.

They've still got quite a ways to go to dig themselves out of the cellar in the AL West. Still, it's as good a streak as manager Bob Melvin could have expected after a disappointing first half.

Yonder Alonso drove in three runs with a pair of two-out hits to back Kendall Graveman's fifth consecutive win, and Oakland Athletics beat the Houston Astros 7-4 on Monday night.

"Guys are putting up some numbers now," Graveman said. "You could go one to nine no matter who's in there, and I think a lot of guys are starting to feel comfortable at the plate. Us as starters are just trying to keep them in ballgames and we know they're going to put up runs."

Khris Davis hit his fourth home run in three games, Marcus Semien had two hits and scored twice while Ryon Healy added an RBI double for the A's.

Oakland has won three of four since the All-Star break.

"It's just timely hitting," Davis said. "When we get those crooked numbers, our pitchers are doing a great job of throwing up a zero and getting us back in. That momentum is huge."

Alonso doubled in a run in the second inning then added a two-run single as part of five-run fourth when the A's sent 12 men to the plate. The Astros walked five batters in the inning, two with the bases loaded.

Graveman (6-6) allowed three runs over seven innings to earn his second straight win over Houston. The right-hander, who also beat the Astros in his final start before the break, struck out five and walked one.

Dyan Dull retired three batters and Ryan Madson pitched the ninth for his 20th save.

Marwin Gonzalez homered for the second time in three games for Houston.

The A's got plenty of help from the Astros pitching.

Starter Mike Fiers allowed six runs over 3 2/3 innings to remain winless in five career starts against Oakland. Fiers (6-4) fanned five and walk three, including two in the fourth.

Michael Feliz replaced Fiers and walked three consecutive batters including Josh Reddick and Danny Valencia with the bases loaded. Reddick had struck out swinging in his first two at-bats before drawing a four-pitch walk to force in Healy.

Davis hit his 23rd home run this season off Scott Feldman in the seventh.

"We got beat by a big inning," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "It's frustrating because we had four or five walks in that inning.. They kept putting up quality at-bats and we couldn't close the inning out."

Houston took a 2-1 lead in the top of the fourth when Carlos Correa scored an unearned run on a throwing error by Healy, Oakland's rookie third baseman. A's manager Bob Melvin tried to argue that Correa interfered with Healy while running from second to third on the play.

FIERS, GOMEZ SQUABBLE

Fiers was not happy about being pulled from the game in the fourth and exchanged words with Hinch. Fiers later got into it with teammate Carlos Gomez as the two went face to face in the Astros dugout. "I can't show that much emotion in the dugout so he was just letting me know that if I had to say something or act, take it inside and do it without anybody watching, which he's right," Fiers said. "I think my emotions got the best of me. I need to be more professional about what I'm doing out there on the field and in the game."

TRAINER'S ROOM

Athletics: Right-hander Nick Tepesch was claimed off waivers by the Royals. Tepesch had been designated for assignment when Oakland needed to clear room for 3B Ryon Healy last week.

UP NEXT

Astros: LHP Dallas Keuchel (6-9) makes his second consecutive start against Oakland on Tuesday at the Coliseum. The reigning AL Cy Young winner allowed one run over seven innings against the A's in his final outing before the All-Star break.

Athletics: Dillon Overton (1-1) will be called up from Triple-A Nashville to start against Houston. This is the rookie left-hander's second stint in the majors.

Injury Ends Cameron's Season

By: Jake Kaplan / Baseball America

HOUSTON—Center fielder Daz Cameron had already made three stops during the first few months of 2016, his first full year as a pro.

His final move will, unfortunately, be his last for the season. He went on the disabled list on July 7 with a broken left index finger, which is a season-ending injury.

Cameron had settled into his role as a table-setter at short-season Tri-City, where the 19-year-old hit .278/.352/.418 through 19 games. The Astros selected the son of former all-star Mike Cameron in the supplemental first round of the 2015 draft out of high school in McDonough, Ga.

Cameron's solid start at Tri-City was an encouraging sign for the Astros, who assigned him to low Class A Quad Cities to begin the season. He hit just .143 and struck out 38 percent of the time, which resulted in a trip to extended spring training.

Back in Kissimmee, Fla., the 6-foot-2, 185-pound Cameron worked with the organization's hitting coordinator and short-season coaches, who helped him re-tool his approach and swing mechanics.

"We just wanted to make sure that when he was taking an offensive approach that was aggressive, (he was) attacking the fastball and not missing his pitches when they were there to hit," farm director Allen Rowin said in an interview before Cameron's injury.

While playing in extended spring, Cameron developed a nice rapport with former all-star outfielder Cesar Cedeno, Rowin said. Cedeno played for the Astros from 1970 to 1981 and is now the hitting coach at Rookie-level Greeneville.

"He just stands out from all of the other competition in extended," Rowin said, "and you can see why he was taken where he was. But it seems like he's fit right in (at Tri-City) and kind of hit his stride there."

Cameron will probably get a second crack at the Midwest League next year.

SPACE SHOTS

- Alex Bregman debuted for Triple-A Fresno on June 30 with a four-hit, five-run, three-RBI game. The No. 2 overall pick in 2015 was expected to continue to play both shortstop and third base as he eyes a big league callup this season.
- Double-A Corpus Christi righthander David Paulino served a team-imposed suspension for violating an undisclosed team policy in June, but when he returned to action, he immediately went on the disabled list.

Grizzlies smack 15 hits, beat Express 8-1

Tyler White hits his 10th homer in a three-hit night

By: Fresno Grizzlies

The Fresno Grizzlies defeated the Round Rock Express 8-1 Monday night from Dell Diamond. The Grizzlies' offense sparked for 15 hits, including three-hit nights by Alex Bregman (3-for-5), Tyler White (3-for-5) and Preston Tucker (3-for-5). With his three-hit night, White extended his team-high hit streak to 14 games.

Fresno took a 1-0 lead in the top of the first when Colin Moran (2-for-5) laced a RBI single to right, scoring Bregman. The lead expanded to 5-0 in the top of the third when Jon Singleton spanked a single to right, scoring White and Tucker. Then, Max Stassi struck a double to right, knocking in two more runs. The Grizzlies made it 6-0 in the top of the sixth after back-to-back doubles by Bregman and Tucker.

Round Rock erased the shutout in the bottom of the seventh when Fresno reliever Kevin Chapman threw a wild pitch, allowing Joey Gallo to score. It was 6-1 Grizzlies after seven innings.

The Grizzlies pushed two more runs across, making it 8-1 in the top of the eighth when White blasted a home run to left. It was his second homer in as many days, his fourth in five days and his 10th of the season.

Fresno starter Brendan McCurry (1-0) took a no-decision after a spot start. He hurled two scoreless frames, allowing five hits, two walks and one strikeout. Reliever Jordan Jankowski (1-2) earned the win after posting three shutout innings, allowing two hits, two walks and punching out five.

Round Rock starter Eric Jokisch (2-2) suffered the loss after tossing two and one-third innings, allowing three runs (earned), on five hits, one walk with three strikeouts.

The two teams will meet for game two of the four-game series Tuesday night. First pitch is scheduled for 5:05 PT. Fresno RHP Joe Musgrove (3-3, 4.60) will face Round Rock RHP Nick Martinez (6-4, 4.36).

Emanuel Gem Snaps Slide

By: Corpus Christi Hooks

MIDLAND - Kent Emanuel twirled seven shutout innings Monday night as the Hooks halted their four-game losing streak with a 3-2 triumph against Midland at Security Bank Ballpark.

Emanuel needed just 83 pitches to navigate a season-high seven frames. The 24-year-old southpaw held the Hounds to four hits and one walk while striking out five. At one point, Emanuel retired 12 in a row.

Corpus Christi (12-12, 59-35) supplied support in the second. J.D. Davis reached via a single and, with two outs, James Ramsay sent a ground ball into center field for a 1-0 lead. Ramsay promptly stole second, advanced to third on a throwing error by Midland (16-8, 49-45) catcher Andy Paz, and then scored when Daniel Gossett (2-4) uncorked a wild pitch.

The Hooks made it 3-0 in the eighth. Chas McDonald cracked a lead-off double against Ben Bracewell. Pinch-runner Chan-Jong Moon later crossed the plate thanks to a sac fly by Conrad Gregor.

Aaron West relieved Emanuel in the eighth and was victimized by three consecutive singles to begin the inning. With the score 3-1, J.P. Sportman forced a walk to load the bases. Tyler Maricov, who plated four runs Sunday, grounded into a 6-4-3 double play, making it a one-run game. Matt Chapman was next and hit a deep fly ball to right field but Danry Vasquez made a great running grab at the fence to end the inning.

Chris Cotton worked around a two-out walk in the ninth to garner his first save of the season.

Cy Sneed (4-2, 3.62) gets the ball for the Hooks Tuesday night. Midland counters with Joel Seddon (3-8, 5.58). First pitch 6:30.

Laureano extends streak in loss at Rancho

Cal League Player of Week picks up three hits, reaches base four times

By: Lancaster JetHawks

RANCHO CUCAMONGA, Calif. - The JetHawks fell to the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes, 8-3, but Ramon Laureano kept rolling on Monday night at LoanMart Field.

Laureano, who was named the Cal League Player of the Week earlier Monday, picked up three hits and drew a walk to extend his hitting streak to 14 games. The outfielder is hitting .519 (27x52) during the streak.

Little else went well for the JetHawks (51-44) who dropped their second-straight game after winning seven in a row.

The Quakes (56-39) broke the game open with a six-run third inning. Josh James (7-3) gave up a two-run home run to Erick Mejia and a three-run home run to Joey Curletta in the frame. The right-hander allowed a career-high eight earned runs on nine hits over six innings. He struck out nine and walked two.

Quakes starter Isaac Anderson (1-0) threw five shutout innings in his Cal League debut. He allowed just two hits and struck out five.

Lancaster scored its first run in the sixth inning when Trent Woodward singled to score Bryan Muniz to make the score 7-1.

Jason Martin and Jamie Ritchie added RBI-singles in the eighth.

Kevin McCanna tossed two scoreless innings of relief for Lancaster.

The four-game series concludes on Tuesday at LoanMart Field. Trent Thornton (6-4) makes the start for the JetHawks against rehabbing Dodgers reliever Yimi Garcia. First pitch is 7:05 p.m.

Valdez fans nine, Dawson homers in 6-3 victory

Ronnie Dawson's 7th inning blast was his 4th of the homestand and 5th of the season

By Peter Fiorentino / Tri-City ValleyCats

Ronnie Dawson smacked his fifth home run of the year and Carmen Benedetti added two RBI as the Tri-City ValleyCats (17-14) defeated the Batavia Muckdogs (6-25), a 6-3 final at Joseph L. Bruno Stadium on Monday night.

Pitching in his best outing this season, Framber Valdez (W, 2-1) fanned nine batters over five innings, allowing a run on five hits. Nick Hernandez picked up the save in relief, his third of the season, as he struck out two in a perfect 9th inning.

The ValleyCats scored three runs in the first inning off of Jordan Holloway (L, 0-3), and now have scored 26 runs in the first frame this season. Rodrigo Ayarza led off with a walk, Ryne Birk singled and Stephen Wrenn walked to load the bases. Carmen Benedetti delivered a two-run base hit, scoring Ayarza and Birk, giving him 14 RBI for the year. Randy Cesar followed with a base hit of his own, scoring Wrenn to give the 'Cats a 3-0 lead.

Edgardo Sandoval, who got the start for Tri-City, pitched two innings, striking out one, and let only one Muckdog reach base when he hit Eric Gutierrez with a pitch in the top of the first.

Batavia put up a run in the 5th when Javier Lopez grounded into a force out with the bases loaded, scoring JJ Gould. Gould wound up as the only Muckdog to not strikeout, and finished 3-4 with a solo home run in the 8th and two singles.

Tri-City, which improved to 4-1 during the six-game homestand, plated a run in the bottom of the 5th when Chuckie Robinson singled off of Shane Sawczak, scoring Cesar and giving the 'Cats a 4-1 lead.

Ronnie Dawson's home run (5) off Sam Perez in the 7th inning gave the 'Cats a five-run cushion. The blast traveled 404 feet to right-center field, and left Dawson's bat at 103 mph. The Astros 2016 2nd round draft pick now has four home runs and 12 RBI in his last five games.

Randy Cesar, who finished 3-3 with three singles and a walk, also scored twice and had an RBI. Cesar is now 17 for his last 29 (.585) with seven RBI and nine runs scored.

Southpaw Howie Brey came on for the 8th inning and allowed Gould's home run and an RBI double from Samuel Castro, before Hernandez closed out the 9th inning.

The 'Cats will look for the sweep in tomorrow's series finale against the Muckdogs, with first pitch is scheduled for 11:00 a.m. Enrique Chavez (2-0, 0.82) will take the mound for the 'Cats in the matinee, while Batavia will send Jose Diaz (0-3, 8.55) to the hill.

Almonte completes rally with walk-off Astros win eighth straight game

By Hunter Reed / Greeneville Astros

Greeneville, TN - The Greeneville Astros (14-11) won their eighth consecutive game on Monday night with another dramatic victory over the Bluefield Blue Jays (10-13). The Astros saved their best for last as they finished the night with a three-run ninth inning and a walk-off sacrifice fly from shortstop Marcos Almonte to give them a 4-3 win.

The Astros trailed the Blue Jays, 3-1, heading into the bottom of the ninth. With their backs against the wall, the Astros got half their hits for the entire night from the first three batters in the inning. Bryan De La Cruz and Luis Payano each singled to start the ninth before Frankeny Fernandez doubled to left field to bring them both home and tie the game at 3-3.

With no outs, the Astros had a chance to close out the game. With Fernandez still at second, Reiny Beltre got on with an error before Ruben Castro advanced both runners over to second and third on a ground out. Then, Vicente Sanchez was intentionally walked to load the bases and potentially set up an inning-ending double play. However, Almonte delivered on a sacrifice fly to right field which allowed Fernandez to head home and slide in front of the throw for the game-winning score.

Following the exhausting 20-inning thriller on Sunday, which Greeneville won 5-4, it was the second straight night the Astros defeated the Blue Jays by a single run in walk-off fashion. It also completed a series sweep for the Astros, their second straight after previously taking down the Pulaski Yankees during this undefeated six-game homestand.

Overall, the Astros have now won eight games in a row to give them their second longest win streak in club history. The team record officially stands at 10 games running from July 11-21 during the 2013 season. Although, that streak went to 13 games, the last three wins did not qualify after losing a game that was suspended and made up later in the season.

The current Astros win streak began on July 10 and also includes two road wins against the Elizabethton Twins, but none have been more exciting than the recent contests against the Blue Jays.

Monday's game began with Bluefield scoring first on a Nash Knight RBI single in the first inning. The score remained 1-0 in their favor all the way until the final two innings.

The Astros, who got their first hit of the night in the fifth inning, were finally able to get on the scoreboard for the first time during the eighth. Sanchez set the tone as he doubled to centerfield to lead off the inning before being moved over to third by an Almonte sacrifice bunt. Tyler Wolfe then stepped up and drove a ball into right field for a sacrifice fly to score Sanchez and tie the game at 1-1.

The Blue Jays attempted to take away any Astros momentum in the top of the ninth as the first two batters got on with singles, leaving runners at the corners. After one strikeout, Kalik May followed with a two-run triple to put Bluefield back up 3-1 and set up the Astros dramatic ninth inning rally.

Ricardo Castro started the game for the Astros and pitched five and two-thirds innings. He finished the night surrendering one unearned run on five hits with four strikeouts before giving way to Abdiel Saldana in the sixth inning.

Saldana (1-0) went the final three and one-third innings and picked up his first win of the season. The 20-year-old, signed out of Panama in 2013, totaled six strikeouts while allowing two runs on five hits.

In a match-up of the current top two teams in the Appalachian League West, the Astros will travel to face the Johnson City Cardinals (13-10) in a three-game set beginning Tuesday at 7:00pm. Right-hander Jorge Guzman will be on the mound making his first start for Greeneville since being called up from the Gulf Coast League Astros last week.

Opponent Clips – at OAK

Oakland cashes in with two outs vs. Astros

By Mark Chiarelli / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's topped the Astros, 7-4, on Monday at the Coliseum, and a major reason for their success stemmed from their approach at the end of innings.

Oakland scored all seven of its runs with two outs, including a five-run fourth inning when they walked five times and sent nine batters to the plate after Kris Davis struck out for the second out in the inning.

Oakland's big inning came in part because of control lapses from Astros starter Mike Fiers and reliever Michael Feliz, who walked three batters in one-third of an inning. But the A's bats certainly contributed to the surge, with Stephen Vogt lacing a two-out double, Yonder Alonso adding a two-run single and rookie Ryon Healy doubling to drive him in.

"Now that's tough to do," manager Bob Melvin said. "It was good to see that we were patient. In a situation with some guys on base, you want to swing it."

Davis added his 23rd home run of the season in the seventh inning -- a powerful opposite-field blast traveling 404 feet, per Statcast™, which also came with two outs.

"I just touch the ball and it goes," Davis said. "All I have to do is get ready on time and touch it."

The A's have won three of four since the All-Star break, showcasing considerable depth in the lineup. Nobody's embodied the hot streak, or the two-out prowess, more than Alonso over the past two days. He sliced a game-tying, two-run double in the sixth inning Sunday against the Blue Jays and followed it Monday with three more RBIs, all with two outs.

"He's swinging great," Melvin said. "When you see him using the whole field, driving the ball to left-center field, that means he's tracking the ball really well."

Alonso is hitting .322 over his last 38 games, a stark contrast to his .210 mark through his first 52. He's also hit three homers over his last 16 games, a significant increase after hitting one homer through 74 games and arriving in Oakland this season without a power pedigree.

He even brought a new celebration to the field Monday, wiggling his hips and pointing to the dugout upon reaching base, something starter Kendall Graveman enjoyed.

"Yonder found that when we were on a plane ride and we just came up with it," Graveman said. "That's definitely something we're having a lot of fun with. We're playing looser, and you see guys start to perform when that happens."

The sinkerballer certainly did his part, allowing three runs (two earned) and finishing seven innings in a game where Oakland's bullpen was maxed out. He acknowledged there's a considerable boost when the offense, like it did Monday, can string together two-out rallies.

"You could go one to nine no matter who's in there, and I think a lot of guys are starting to feel comfortable at the plate," Graveman said. "[The] starters are just trying to keep them in ballgames and we know they're going to put up runs right now."

A's tab Overton for start against Astros

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Left-hander Dillon Overton will be added to the A's roster Tuesday for a spot start against the visiting Astros, marking his second big league stint.

Overton replaces scheduled starter Sean Manaea, who was forced into action in the second inning of Sunday's loss to the Blue Jays following the unexpected departures of starter Rich Hill (blister) and reliever Andrew Triggs, who took a liner to his left calf and suffered a contusion.

"It's good he'll get another opportunity," A's manager Bob Melvin said of Overton. "Obviously the reason for it is not great, but this is a guy we talked about in Spring Training and we felt like at some point in time he'd get an opportunity, and this will be his second one."

Overton, who had not pitched above the Double-A level before this year, made two starts upon his first callup, delivering mixed results. He picked up the win in his debut with 5 2/3 innings of three-run ball against the Angels, before stumbling in a three-inning, eight-run outing against the Giants.

Overton returned to Triple-A Nashville and posted a 2.77 ERA in two starts, both wins. He'll be pitching on eight days' rest Tuesday, having thrown on the side three times in that span.

"The last game I was up here, we kind of switched some things up and obviously it didn't work out very well," Overton said. "I wasn't working in to as many hitters as much as I wanted to, so I wasn't able to open up the outside part of the plate with my changeup, and usually I like to throw way in to hitters and then use the changeup on the other side, so I just went back to that when I went down and everything's been good."

Melvin said there's still no timetable for Hill's next start. Triggs, he noted, is "going to do everything he can to not go on the disabled list."