

Astros Daily Clips

Tuesday, September 20, 2016

Astros rally past A's to boost Wild Card push

By Rick Eymer and Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The Astros were in desperate need of a hero in the late innings Monday night, and Marwin Gonzalez answered the call.

Gonzalez hit a two-run single with the bases loaded in the ninth inning off Ryan Madson to snap a tie and send the Astros to a 4-2, come-from-behind win over the A's at the Oakland Coliseum to keep pace in the American League Wild Card race.

"For the team, it's great," Gonzalez said. "Everybody is doing their part. We're fighting until the end. Nobody's quitting. The pitchers are making good pitches, and the defense is there, too. We have to fight until the end."

The Astros are three games behind the Blue Jays and Orioles for an AL Wild Card spot, but pulled even with the Mariners in the standings.

"I loved how our team hung in there until the end," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "We couldn't solve [A's starter Jharel] Cotton at all early. The at-bats got a lot better as the game progressed, and some of the biggest at-bats were when the game was on the line. I liked how we gutted it out in the eighth and ninth in a park we struggle to win in."

The Astros couldn't manage much offense against Cotton, who held them to one run and two hits in six innings. Evan Gattis' career-high 28th homer of the year in the second inning put the Astros ahead, but Ryon Healy and Bruce Maxwell homered off Brad Peacock in the second to put Oakland ahead, 2-1.

"He pitched great," A's manager Bob Melvin said of Cotton. "A low pitch count as we cut back on his innings. He located well and threw his change in any count."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Marwin comes up clutch: The versatile switch-hitter, who's been getting most of the starts at first base recently, delivered his biggest hit of the season. After Jose Altuve and Carlos Correa began the ninth with singles, the A's walked Gattis to loaded the bases for Gonzalez, who shot a single up the middle past a drawn-in infield for the winner. [More >](#)

"He was in a really bad situation," Gonzalez said of Madson. "I knew that he was going to try to get up in the count, and I was trying to do the same thing."

Power drive: A pair of rookies went deep for the A's in the bottom of the second, giving them the lead. Healy's solo shot was a no-doubter. Maxwell's homer, the first of his career, just made it over the left-field fence. It should be easy to find since it landed in an area where only the scoreboard operator can get to it.

"I'm sure I'll get it tomorrow," Maxwell said of getting the ball. "It felt good to get the first one."

Great White attacks: Astros rookie Tyler White came off the bench in the eighth inning and had one his biggest hits since the first week of the season when he shot a pinch-hit double into the left-field corner to score Teoscar Hernandez from first base to tie the game. It was White's third pinch-hit double of the season, tying a franchise record.

"I was just looking for fastballs really," White said. "Pinch-hitting, I was looking for a pitch to hit and something up in the zone and ended up having a longer at-bat than I normally would pinch-hitting. Got a fastball I was able to handle and luckily snuck it in there right inside the line."

A real game-saver: Madson took "saves" to a new height with a brilliant fielding play in the eighth. With runners on first and third and two outs, Yulieski Gurriel hit a slow chopper toward third that the 36-year-old Madson tracked down, grabbed with his right hand and threw, his momentum carrying him away, with enough on it to get the out at first.

"The ball off the bat, you don't think he has any play at all," Melvin said. "It was a great play."

QUOTABLE

"It didn't make me sad when they took him out of the game," -- Hinch on Cotton

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Altuve needs one more hit to reach 200 for the third consecutive year, which would make him the third second baseman to do that in three straight seasons along with Charlie Gehringer and Rogers Hornsby.

REPLAY REVIEW

The Astros successfully challenged a call at first base in the third inning. Stephen Vogt was called safe on a grounder to Altuve, but replay showed Gonzalez was able to stretch and touch the base in time, and the call was overturned.

REPLAY REVIEW II

The Athletics challenged the slide rule at second base in breaking up a double play. The Astros' Jake Marisnick was cleared of any wrongdoing on the replay and the play stood, leaving runners at the corners with two outs.

WHAT'S NEXT

Astros: Rookie right-hander Joe Musgrove (3-4, 4.71 ERA) will get the start for the Astros in Tuesday's 9:05 p.m. CT game against the A's. Musgrove is coming off consecutive quality starts against the Cubs and Rangers, a pair of first-place teams. On the road, he's 1-3 with an 8.71 ERA in four starts.

Athletics: Left-hander Sean Manaea threw five scoreless innings in his last start and is 4-5 with a 3.07 ERA since returning from the disabled list on June 29. He's second among American League rookies with 109 strikeouts and 125 2/3 innings. He's 0-1 with a 2.35 ERA in three starts against the Astros this season. First pitch is 7:05 p.m. PT.

Altuve up for Esurance Best Major Leaguer

Balloting open until Nov. 11 to reward game's elite

By Doug Miller / MLB.com

They are the reason we buy tickets. They hit for average and power, they run, they throw, they defend and they thrill, night after night.

The plan for Major League Baseball's best players is to show up to work every day, do something to help a team win and hopefully delight fans in the process.

The best of those players transcend the sport because they do it over and over again for much of the grinding 162-game slate. And at the end of each season, they are rewarded for their impact and excellence.

One of the top honors to receive is the prestigious Esurance MLB Award for Best Major Leaguer, and the list of nominees for the 2016 campaign consists of usual suspects plus up-and-comers who have shown they are not only brilliant but also polished well beyond their years.

The choice will come down to Astros second baseman Jose Altuve, Red Sox outfielder Mookie Betts, Cubs third baseman Kris Bryant, Blue Jays third baseman Josh Donaldson and Angels center fielder Mike Trout.

All five have dominated in the stat books with different skill sets that showcase everything that makes a winning baseball player, and cases can be made for all five, but only one will take home the hardware.

The Esurance MLB Awards annually honor Major League Baseball's greatest achievements as part of an industry-wide balloting process that includes five groups, each of which accounts for 20 percent of the overall vote: media, front-office personnel, retired MLB players, fans at MLB.com and Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) voters.

The MLB Awards are an all-inclusive program, encompassing the top players and performances from both the American and National Leagues from Opening Day through the end of the postseason.

Individual awards will go to the Best Major Leaguer in addition to the winners in the following categories: Best Hitter, Pitcher, Rookie, Defensive Player, Manager, Executive, Social Media Personality and Postseason Performer.

Winners will also be recognized for the year's Best Offensive Play, Defensive Play, Moment, Single-Game Performance, Social Media Post, Fan Catch, Interview, Broadcast Call, Player-Fan Interaction and Trending Topic.

Voting began Monday on MLB.com/awards, one hour after the inaugural Esurance MLB Fans of the Year winners were announced.

Voting for the MLB Awards will remain open until 2 p.m. ET on Nov. 11 by visiting MLB.com/awards. Winners will be announced live on MLB Network and MLB.com on Nov. 18.

Altuve just keeps getting better and better. Entering Monday, the dynamo continued to build on his strong case for multiple awards with a .337 batting average, 24 home runs, 40 doubles, 94 RBIs and 27 stolen bases.

"We've seen this season out of him and been around it every day," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "Having not been around every other player every day, it's hard to argue anyone is having a better season. It's as impactful in all facets as anyone can be -- his power, the speed, the hits. I think he's up there in every category. It's nice to see him put it all together and be a complete player. I know he's our MVP, for sure."

While Betts' first two years showed he was already very good and still full of potential, it's safe to say no one saw the power explosion he's put on in 2016.

Heading into Monday's games, Betts, still only 23 years old and in his second full season in the bigs, had 30 homers, 106 RBIs and 24 stolen bases.

"Right now, I think he's the best player in all of baseball," Boston ace David Price said. "I have the utmost respect for Donaldson and Mike Trout and Jose Altuve, but Mookie's been special. And when a guy has never done it before, that makes it a little more special."

The same could be said for Bryant, last year's NL Rookie of the Year and a clear contender for the NL Most Valuable Player Award this time around. He boasted a .295 batting average, 37 homers and 96 RBIs heading into his team's Monday game against the Reds. Bryant has been so good that the Wrigley Field fans have been showering him with "MVP" chants for months.

"It's pretty cool," Bryant said. "Growing up, you hear that on TV, and to hear it now, it's humbling and keeps me going and keeps me determined to do more. It's pretty cool to hear."

Donaldson heard the same chants last year in Toronto, and for good reason. He ended up winning the AL MVP Award, and he has improved in a few categories this time around, with a .955 OPS, 34 homers and 93 RBIs as of Monday.

"My goals aren't necessarily to win the MVP, but to help my team win," Donaldson said upon accepting that honor last November. "I feel like if you're successful in that, all the awards and that jazz come along with it. I felt the fans supported me all year long, and that was just another way they did that."

Trout is another former AL MVP Award winner and a contender every year. This season is no different, despite his team's struggles. Trout has again excelled, with a .990 OPS and 27 homers, 90 RBIs, 26 stolen bases and 113 runs scored heading into Monday.

"Mike is a special talent," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said earlier this season. "He as good as there is. When Mike is right, there's no doubt he's one guy the other team doesn't want to have beat them."

Marwin finds marvelous way to snap slump

Astros 1B delivers go-ahead hit in 9th to beat A's

By Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The only hit with runners in scoring position in Monday's game kept the Astros from falling a game back in the American League Wild Card race.

Marwin Gonzalez came to bat with the bases loaded in the ninth inning of a tied game and ripped the first pitch he saw from A's reliever Ryan Madson up the middle to score a pair of runs and send the Astros to a clutch, 4-2 win at Oakland Coliseum.

"I was trying to get a good pitch to hit," said Gonzalez, who snapped an 0-for-12 slump with the single. "It's been rough the last few days, but I was trying to come up and make contact."

The Astros are three games behind the Blue Jays and Orioles for an AL Wild Card spot, but pulled even with the Mariners in the standings.

"For the team, it's great," Gonzalez said. "Everybody is doing their part. We're fighting until the end. Nobody's quitting. The pitchers are making good pitches, and the defense is there, too. We have to fight until the end."

The Astros had managed only two baserunners through seven innings, including Evan Gattis' career-high 28th homer, and rallied in the eighth, down 2-1. Teoscar Hernandez singled and scored from first on a pinch-hit double by Tyler White to tie the game.

"There's so many critical at-bats that we won," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said.

Jose Altuve began the ninth inning with a single to right that was his 199th hit of the season. Altuve was trying to steal second when Carlos Correa shot an outside pitch right to where second baseman Joey Wendle was standing before taking off to cover the base for a single to that put runners at first and third.

"With two strikes, he's going to get some secondary pitches, he's going to focus on trying to put Correa away so we felt we had a chance to run the bases there," Hinch said. "Hitting with two strikes, he did a good job staying behind the ball and hitting the ball the other way on a well-executed pitch, so it obviously worked out in our favor."

The A's walked Gattis to load the bases with no outs for Gonzalez, who jumped on the first pitch from Madson and sent it past a drawn-in infield for the game-winner.

"He didn't get too big," Hinch said of Gonzalez. "Sometimes our guys want to win so badly and want to be the guy, and we can come out of our swing a little bit. We can swing hard and have some emptiness to some of our swings, but not tonight. [He was] working the ball up the middle and taking whatever Madson gave him. The infield's drawn in, which opens up a lot of holes. I was just really proud of the quality of the at-bat."

McCullers to throw off mound in elbow rehab

Astros hope righty returns for possible postseason run

By Brian McTaggart / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Astros right-hander Lance McCullers, who hasn't pitched since Aug. 2 because of a mild right elbow sprain, is expected to throw off the mound in Houston this week, general manager Jeff Luhnow said Monday. The Astros are holding out hope McCullers could help them if the team makes the postseason

McCullers, who went 6-5 with a 3.22 ERA with 106 strikeouts in 81 innings this year, has been throwing off flat ground for a couple of weeks, so it's unlikely he would be available in the regular season at this point.

"Going from flat ground to the mound is a big deal in the rehab progression," Luhnow said. "He's going to do that hopefully a couple of times and then we'll have our next, sort of, checkpoint to see if it makes sense for him to start facing hitters. That's positive progress. How quickly all that can happen remains to be seen."

Meanwhile, left-hander Dallas Keuchel hasn't thrown in two weeks because of left shoulder inflammation, and Luhnow indicated he won't throw anytime soon. Keuchel said Friday the injury requires four to six weeks of rest, though he was hopeful to shorten that timeline. Luhnow didn't sound as optimistic Monday.

"Still not throwing, so the more days that go by without throwing, the longer it's going to take him to ramp up," Luhnow said. "We'd have to go to pretty deep into the postseason for that even to be a consideration."

Finally, rookie infielder Alex Bregman, who strained his hamstring running the bases Wednesday in Houston, appears headed for a long recovery as well, Luhnow said. Like Keuchel, it could take a long playoff run to get Bregman back for 2016, and even that's not a sure thing.

"With those types of injuries, you have to plan for a four-to-six week type of full rehab," Luhnow said. "Clearly, when there's a lot of urgency to get back and the player is really driven to get back and the team really needs the player, things can happen. He is making progress incrementally each day, feeling a little bit better and able to do a little bit more, [but] we're still a ways away from knowing whether he's able to do anything this year."

Astros turn to Musgrove vs. A's in Wild Card drive

By Rick Eymer / Special to MLB.com

At the end of play on May 23, the Athletics had a better record than the Astros by 2 1/2 games. Since then, they have gone their separate ways.

The Astros moved past the A's on June 3 and never looked back, putting themselves into contention for a postseason spot with 12 games remaining. Houston enters Tuesday three games behind the Blue Jays and Orioles for a Wild Card spot.

Astros rookie right-hander Joe Musgrove takes the mound Tuesday hoping to reverse a bad trend on the road, where he has an ERA of 8.71, as opposed to a 1.86 mark at home. He threw 5 1/3 scoreless innings against the A's in Houston.

"Joe's a good pitcher and has a lot of different weapons to use," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "The issue that he faces every night is how to mix his pitches. It's not to say he doesn't have velocity or doesn't have different approaches. He just has to use his pitches correctly and use all parts of the strike zone."

The A's are in their final homestand after their best road trip of the season, having won six of seven. They'll call on left-hander Sean Manaea, who's turned his season around after spending time on the disabled list with a 3.07 ERA since June 29.

"We played our best baseball of the season this last road trip," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "It was as fun a road trip as I have ever been on. It's fun to watch these guys come in and play baseball without an agenda. You see a guy like Joey Wendle or Ryon Healy having so much fun and you get reinvigorated. It sets a nice tone for the rest of the season."

Things to know about this game

- Jose Altuve entered Monday hitting .378 on the road this year, the best since Ichiro Suzuki hit .405 on the road in 2004.
- Marwin Gonzalez, Carlos Correa and Altuve are a combined 1-for-18 against Manaea, while Evan Gattis and George Springer have combined to go 5-for-14 against the lefty.
- Danny Valencia has hit seven home runs in 30 games against the Astros, matching his most against any team (7 vs. Rays in 52 games).

Vote: Esurance MLB Awards balloting begins

Fans have say in who takes home hardware for 2016

By Mark Newman / MLB.com

Voting is underway through Nov. 11 at MLB.com/awards to help decide the annual Esurance MLB Awards, recognizing 20 suspenseful categories and starting right now with Best Major Leaguer, Best Hitter, Best Pitcher and Best Rookie.

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Baseball already has the most prestigious awards season in professional sports, and this is your chance to have a big say in some of that hardware distribution. You have watched the action since Spring Training, you have shared all those social media posts, you caught the foul balls, you played highlight after highlight and voted for All-Stars. Now your moment has arrived.

Here is a look at your first four categories, starting with the biggest prize:

Best Major Leaguer

The great Willie Mays once said, "I think I was the best baseball player I ever saw." Well, it's time for you to think hard about who was the "best baseball player" in 2016, and you'd better bring that same kind of Willie Mays confidence to your own vote here because these are your five amazing choices, with WAR in parentheses.

Astros second baseman Jose Altuve (7.7), Red Sox right fielder Mookie Betts (8.4), Cubs third baseman Kris Bryant (7.1), Blue Jays third baseman Josh Donaldson (6.9) and Angels center fielder Mike Trout (9.4). We're looking for the best of the best. Simple, right?

Best Hitter

Nominees include Altuve, Bryant, Trout, Nationals second baseman Daniel Murphy and Red Sox designated hitter David Ortiz. Altuve and Murphy are working on batting titles, and Bryant makes everyone at Wrigley Field happy. Trout's homers are down in 2016, but that seems kind of nitpicky considering his overall numbers. It's not like Big Papi needs more firepower to get your vote, but that whole swan song thing could be an X-factor.

This is changed from last year's Best Everyday Player category, as it does not count stolen bases or defense.

Best Pitcher

Madison Bumgarner of the Giants, Kyle Hendricks and Jon Lester of the Cubs, Corey Kluber of the Indians and Max Scherzer of the Nationals are your options. Kluber is the only American League nominee, but is he also the best pitcher in MLB? What do you value most? Scherzer's MLB-high strikeouts or Hendricks' MLB-low ERA? Lester's 18 starts of no more than one run allowed? Bumgarner's overall dominance, not to mention his almost legendary value at the plate? Put it all together and choose one uber-arm.

Starters and relievers were all considered for this award, which was Best Starter in 2015.

Best Rookie

Dodgers shortstop Corey Seager and Tigers right-hander Michael Fulmer have drawn most of the buzz over this award throughout the summer, but they've got company. Is there enough body of evidence to go with Yankees catcher Gary Sanchez and his phenomenal emergence? Tyler Naquin has helped fuel Cleveland's 2016 rise, and you have to wonder if his inside-the-park walk-off on Aug. 20 will just keep everyone talking through this ballot. Trea Turner of the Nationals was the NL Rookie of the Month for August; does that momentum continue?

The MLB Awards are an all-inclusive program, encompassing the top players and performances from both the American and National Leagues, broken into 20 categories from Opening Day through the end of the postseason.

Individual awards will go to the Best Major Leaguer in addition to the winners in the following categories: Best Hitter, Pitcher, Rookie, Defensive Player, Manager, Executive, Social Media Personality and Postseason Performer.

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Ranking this year's rookies based on long-term value

By: Jim Callis / MLB.com

Baseball experienced a historic rookie class in 2015, perhaps the best ever in game's long history. Kris Bryant, Carlos Correa, Francisco Lindor and Noah Syndergaard graduated from prospects to stars in their first seasons in the big leagues, and there was plenty of depth behind them.

While this year's rookies can't compare to their immediate predecessors, the Class of 2016 is still a formidable group. We've seen elite prospects make the jump (Corey Seager, Trea Turner), the first two picks in last year's Draft swiftly make an impact (Dansby Swanson, Alex Bregman) and relatively unheralded players make headlines (Aledmys Diaz, Trevor Story).

It seems a given that Seager, who's a legitimate National League MVP candidate, and Michael Fulmer, who could lead the American League in ERA if he pitches enough innings to qualify, will win the league Rookie of the Year awards. But which of this year's rookies will have the best careers? We rank them below.

Only players who have exhausted their rookie eligibility or are on pace to do so before season's end were considered, which is why Yoan Moncada and Lucas Giolito are absent. So too are Andrew Benintendi and Aaron Judge, who likely would have exceeded the 130 at-bat limit if not for late-seasons injuries. Yulieski Gurriel and Kenta Maeda, who are quite talented but have fewer productive seasons left than rookies five and 10 years younger, don't make the cut as well.

1. Corey Seager, SS, Dodgers

He entered the season as the consensus No. 1 prospect in baseball and could finish it with 200 hits and 30 homers. This is only the beginning for Seager, who potentially has batting championships and MVP awards in his future.

2. Alex Bregman, 3B/SS, Astros

The Brady Aiken saga has worked out well for the Astros, who turned the compensation pick they got for not signing the No. 1 choice in the 2014 Draft into Bregman (the No. 2 selection in 2015). His bat and makeup are beyond reproach, and his power and defensive versatility are better than expected.

3. Byron Buxton, OF, Twins

The Twins didn't do Buxton any favors by rushing him, but since he got his first extended time in Triple-A, he has batted .311/.364/.705 with six homers in 17 September games. Small sample size, sure, but he still has better tools than most big leaguers and is just 22.

4. Julio Urias, LHP, Dodgers

The ridiculously precocious Urias earned his first two Major League wins before he turned 20 on Aug. 12. Though he's still on a tight innings count -- he'll spend the rest of the year in the bullpen -- he was the Dodgers' most reliable starter down the stretch as they took control of the NL West.

5. Trea Turner, OF/INF, Nationals

The Nationals hesitated to make him a starter until the second half, but Turner has batted .348/.367/.581 with 11 homers and 27 steals in just over a third of a season since they came to their senses. He won't maintain those numbers, but he does have game-changing speed, more pop than most burners and the capability of playing center field, second base or shortstop.

6. David Dahl, OF, Rockies

Significant injuries derailed him in 2013 and 2015, but a fully healthy Dahl showed what he could do this year by chasing a 25-25 season (combining his stats in the Majors and Minors) and tying a big league record by hitting safely in his first 17 games. This is what a five-tool center fielder looks like, though the Rockies have played him mostly in left.

7. Dansby Swanson, SS, Braves

Part of the heist from the D-backs in the Shelby Miller trade last December, Swanson will be the face of his hometown franchise. The No. 1 overall pick in the 2015 Draft handled the jump from Double-A to Atlanta with aplomb, and while he doesn't have the offensive ceiling of the other players in this Top 10, he'll outproduce most shortstops while playing solid defense.

8. Nomar Mazara, OF, Rangers

Unexpectedly thrust into a starting role when Shin-Soo Choo strained a calf muscle in the first week of the season, Mazara has stayed in the lineup for the likely AL West champs ever since. He has an advanced approach for a 21-year-old, and he'll grow into 30-homer power.

9. Blake Snell, LHP, Rays

The Rays had a record 10 picks before the second round of the 2011 Draft, though it looks like they'll go 1-for-10. Fortunately for them, the lone keeper in the bunch is a frontline left-hander in Snell, who can miss bats with his fastball, curveball and changeup but will need to refine his command.

10. Gary Sanchez, C, Yankees

The Yankees have gone from Trade Deadline sellers to stealth contenders, thanks in large part to Sanchez, who reached 11 homers quicker than any player in Major League history. His power is for real, as is his arm strength, and he could become an All-Star after showing more maturity and receiving prowess the last two years.

The Next 20:

11. Steven Matz, LHP, Mets

12. Willson Contreras, C, Cubs

13. Orlando Arcia, SS, Brewers

14. Michael Fulmer, RHP, Tigers

15. Jameson Taillon, RHP, Pirates

16. Trevor Story, SS, Rockies

17. Joey Gallo, 3B, Rangers

18. Jose Berrios, RHP, Twins

19. Josh Bell, 1B, Pirates

20. Jon Gray, RHP, Rockies

21. Tim Anderson, SS, White Sox

22. Max Kepler, OF, Twins

23. Aledmys Diaz, SS, Cardinals

24. Raul Mondesi, 2B/SS, Royals

25. Cody Reed, LHP, Reds

26. Sean Manaea, LHP, Athletics

27. Dylan Bundy, RHP, Orioles

28. Archie Bradley, RHP, Diamondbacks

29. A.J. Reed, 1B, Astros

30. Jake Thompson, RHP, Phillies

Astros rally in late innings to beat A's, keep pace

By Jake Kaplan / Houston Chronicle

OAKLAND, Calif - A dwindling schedule leaves the Astros almost no margin for error. They are guaranteed merely 12 more games, and each loss could, in essence, sink their season.

A defeat they could ill afford appeared to be on their docket through seven innings of Monday night's series opener at the Oakland Coliseum. Two baserunners marked the extent of their offense. They had six outs with which to work.

But without an answer at the plate much of the night, the Astros still managed more late-game heroics in a 4-2 victory against the Athletics. Marwin Gonzalez's two-run single off A's closer Ryan Madson capped the come-from-behind win, which allowed the Astros to remain three games back in the wild card race.

After improving to 79-71, the Astros enter Tuesday three games behind both the Orioles and the Blue Jays, who beat Mariners on Monday night in Seattle. The Tigers, who were idle Monday, are a half-game ahead of the Astros and the Mariners.

"Nobody's quitting," said Gonzalez, the Astros' super utility man whose game-winning hit snapped an 0-for-12 skid. "We're going to fight until the last game."

Their first breakthrough Monday came in the eighth inning. Trailing 2-1 and with Teoscar Hernandez standing on first base after a one-out single, Tyler White pinch-hit and sneaked a line drive down the third-base line for a game-tying double.

After Luke Gregerson stranded a runner on third base in the bottom of the inning, Jose Altuve sparked the two-run ninth with a leadoff single – his major league-leading 199th hit of the season – and an attempted steal of second base on Ryan Madson's fourth pitch to Correa.

The Astros' coaches put on the sign for Altuve to steal, anticipating a secondary pitch to Correa in a 1-2 count. They were correct – Madson threw a changeup – and with A's second baseman Joey Wendle running to cover second base, Correa stayed behind the ball and poked a single through the vacated spot on the right side of the infield.

"It worked out pretty well," Correa said. "I'm glad it went through."

Oakland manager Bob Melvin called for Madson to intentionally walk Evan Gattis to set up a potential double play. Gonzalez followed by shooting the first pitch he saw up the middle past a drawn-in infield.

Ken Giles shut the door with a perfect ninth against the A's No. 3 through 5 hitters. The Astros closer touched 100 mph on two of his pitches to Khris Davis, including the heater that struck out the slugger.

"We need them all," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said of the win. "I loved how our team hung in there until the end."

Before experiencing success against the Oakland bullpen, the Astros failed to solve A's rookie Jharel Cotton, a touted prospect making only his third major league start.

The 24-year-old righthander allowed just two hits, struck out six and did not issue a walk. Gattis' solo homer in the second inning – his career-high 28th of the season – provided the lone blemish to Cotton's night.

Cotton came into Monday with all of 12 innings of big league experience. The only exposure Astros players had to him came in the minor leagues. He was with the Dodgers until Aug. 1, when they parted with him to consummate a trade deadline deal for lefthander Rich Hill.

Cotton's best secondary pitch is his changeup, and Hinch played more right-handed batters than usual to try and negate the pitch. The result was more breaking balls. The Astros struggled to hit him either way. Their saving grace was Melvin pulling Cotton after only 75 pitches.

"It didn't make me sad," Hinch said, "when he came out of the game."

Six Astros pitchers combined to allow only three hits. Starter Brad Peacock completed the first 5 1/3 innings. Home runs by Ryon Healy and Bruce Maxwell – both on hanging 1-1 sliders from Peacock in the second inning – signified the A's offense.

At that point, it was more than the Astros could claim. And then it wasn't.

"Their pitcher did a great job. He's got good stuff," Correa said. "Obviously we needed to make some adjustments. We were able to rally in that last inning and we were able to win the game. So that's all that matters."

Astros report: Return of Dallas Keuchel, Lance McCullers contingent on postseason

By Jake Kaplan / Houston Chronicle

OAKLAND, Calif. - With the Astros guaranteed only 12 games after Monday, the rotation they've used recently is the one with which they will finish the regular season.

A 2016 return of righthander Lance McCullers or lefthander Dallas Keuchel will require a postseason berth, the possibility of which remains remote. And even then, it's not guaranteed either pitcher would be available.

"At this point, neither could build up quickly enough to start in the regular season," general manager Jeff Luhnow said Monday. "Whether or not either could be available to start in the postseason remains to be seen, (depending on) how deep we go and what kind of progress they're making."

McCullers is closer than Keuchel, who is only two weeks removed from being shut down because of left shoulder inflammation. Keuchel said doctors recommended he rest for four to six weeks.

McCullers is seven weeks removed from exiting his last start with an elbow sprain. After weeks of playing catch, the 22-year-old will throw off a mound "in the next few days," according to Luhnow.

"That will be the next big milestone for him," the GM said.

McCullers would need to pitch off the mound a few times before facing hitters - either in a simulated game or live batting practice - so it's premature to even speculate a timetable for a potential return.

Ditto for Keuchel, who is with the Astros on their road trip but has yet to play catch. Although he said Friday he expected to play catch in Oakland if the Astros won their series in Seattle - they took two of three - it's unclear when he will do so.

As for third baseman Alex Bregman, also likely out for the remainder of the regular season because of a hamstring strain, Luhnow said: "He's working hard, but those types of injuries take awhile to resolve themselves.

"Every day we're seeing a little bit of progress, and he certainly is champing at the bit wanting to be here and wanting to help these guys out. But (the) timeline is still not clear."

Fall ball possible for Paulino

Depending on how many more innings he logs over the Astros' final 12 games, prospect David Paulino might still pitch in the Arizona Fall League.

Since losing his rotation spot to Brad Peacock after his uninspiring Sept. 8 major league debut, Paulino has pitched only one inning in relief. Barring a change, the 22-year-old righthander's role the rest of the season will be minimal, so his arm should be fresh enough for 25 or so more innings in the AFL.

"We're not ruling out the possibility of him going to get innings either in the AFL or potentially winter ball if we feel that that's in his best interests," Astros general manager Jeff Luhnow said.

Paulino has thrown only 94 innings this season among Class AA, Class AAA and the majors. He was among the original Astros contingent slated to play for the AFL's Glendale Desert Dogs but was removed from the roster after his promotion to the big leagues.

The experience of pitching in the prospect-laden AFL would be valuable for Paulino, who clearly needs more development time. Each team gets to tab one starting pitcher among its AFL contingent. Paulino had been the Astros' choice.

Francis Martes, the Astros' top pitching prospect, headlines the organization's group of players who will take part in the AFL, which begins Oct. 11. Catcher Garrett Stubbs and outfielders are Ramon Laureano and Jason Martin are also on the Glendale roster.

McCullers among award candidates

Astros starting pitcher Lance McCullers was voted by fans as the American League West's representative on the Marvin Miller Man of the Year award ballot.

Major league players will vote on the overall winner as part of the 2016 Players Choice Awards ballots distributed Sept. 20. The Miller award is presented "to the player whose on-field performance and contributions to his community most inspire others to higher levels of achievement."

McCullers and his wife, Kara, founded the Lance McCullers Jr. Foundation to "invest, bring awareness, and create programs aimed at advocates for stray and homeless animals across the country," according to the organization's website. Their goal is to "support shelters and programs that promote pet adoptions and continue on the journey to make Houston a no-kill city."

Rob Refsnyder of the Yankees, David Robertson of the White Sox, Anthony Rizzo of the Cubs, Curtis Granderson of the Mets and Justin Turner of the Dodgers are the other five divisional winners.

Adam Jones of the Orioles garnered the 2015 Marvin Miller Man of the Year honor. The award, named after the late longtime executive director of the MLB players' association, was first presented in 1997.

Odds and ends

The Astros plan to stay in rotation for this week's four-game home series against the Angels. Mike Fiers, Doug Fister, Brad Peacock and Joe Musgrove are scheduled to start against Los Angeles. ... The Astros' instructional league for rookie-ball-level minor leaguers begins this week at the team's spring training facility in Kissimmee, Fla.

Marwin Gonzalez's late game RBI lifts Astros past Athletics

By Jake Kaplan / Houston Chronicle

OAKLAND --- With six outs left to work with Monday night at Oakland Coliseum, the Astros appeared headed for a loss that would have severely crippled their outside chance at the postseason.

But after tying the score in the eighth, Marwin Gonzalez smacked a two-run single in the ninth to lift the Astros to a 4-2 win against the Athletics. The victory allowed the Astros to remain three games back in the wild card race with 12 to play.

Jose Altuve sparked the two-run ninth with a leadoff single - his 199th hit of the season - and an attempted steal on A's closer Ryan Madson's fourth pitch to Carlos Correa. With Oakland second baseman Joey Wendle running to cover second, Correa poked a single through the vacated spot in the infield.

After the A's intentionally walked Evan Gattis, Gonzalez delivered the go-ahead hit.

A game-tying, pinch-hit RBI double from Tyler White preceded Gonzalez's heroics. Before breaking through in the eighth, the Astros had mustered only two baserunners through seven innings against rookie Jharel Cotton and relief pitcher Ryan Dull. Gattis' solo homer in the second marked their lone damage to that point.

Cotton, the A's starter, came into Monday with all of 12 innings of major league experience. The only exposure Astros players had to the 24-year-old righthander came in the minor leagues. He was with the Dodgers until Aug. 1, when they parted with him to consummate a trade deadline deal for lefthander Rich Hill.

Cotton relies heavily on his changeup to complement his low 90s fastball, one reason Astros manager A.J. Hinch started seven right-handed hitters - including the rookie outfielder in Hernandez - to oppose the righthander. Left-handed hitters entered Monday 1 for 18 against Cotton opposed to 8 for 27 from right-handed hitters.

"Cotton's got a really good changeup," Hinch said. "He doesn't spin the ball a ton. And a small sample in the big leagues has confirmed his minor league track record of handling lefties a little better than righties. So, I'm trying to take away a little bit of his changeup usage in putting some right-handed hitters in there."

The Astros' results against Cotton were minimal. They only two hits off the 24-year-old righthander, who logged only six innings despite a pitch count of just 75. He struck out six and did not issue a walk.

The lone blemish on Cotton's third big league start came on a full-count fastball over the middle of the plate in the second inning. Gattis crushed the pitch out to left-center field, setting a new career high with his 28th home run of the season.

Astros starter Brad Peacock allowed only three hits over 5 1/3 innings. The first two left the field of play.

The homers, off the bats of Ryon Healy and Bruce Maxwell, came in a span of three batters in the second inning. On each, Peacock was victimized by hanging sliders in 1-1 counts.

A one-out double in the sixth by Danny Valencia ended Peacock's night. Hinch called on lefthander Kevin Chapman to retire Stephen Vogt and Pat Neshek for Khris Davis. Will Harris took over for the seventh.

Luke Gregerson stranded a runner on third base in the eighth. Ken Giles closed the door with a 1-2-3 ninth.

Postseason required for Astros if McCullers or Keuchel to return in 2016

By Jake Kaplan / Houston Chronicle

OAKLAND --- At this late juncture in the season, with the Astros guaranteed only more 12 games after Monday, the rotation they've used recently is the one with which they will finish the regular season.

A 2016 return of either Lance McCullers or Dallas Keuchel will require a postseason berth, the possibility of which remains remote for the Astros. And even then, it's not a guarantee either of their top two starters would be available.

"At this point, neither could build up quickly enough to start in the regular season," general manager Jeff Luhnow said on Monday.

"Whether or not either could be available to start in the postseason remains to be seen, (depending on) how deep we go and what kind of progress they're making."

McCullers is closer than Keuchel, who is still only two weeks removed from being shut down because of left shoulder inflammation, a period of rest that doctors recommended to last four to six weeks, according to Keuchel.

McCullers, on the other hand, is seven weeks removed from when he exited his last start with an elbow sprain. After weeks of playing catch, the 22-year-old righthander is scheduled to get off a mound for the first time in his rehabilitation "in the next few days," according to Luhnow

"That will be the next big milestone for him," the GM said.

McCullers would need to pitch off the mound a few times before facing hitters – either in a simulated game or live batting practice – so it's still premature to even speculate a timetable for a potential return.

Ditto for Keuchel, who is with the Astros on their road trip but has still yet to play catch. Although he said Friday he expected to play catch in Oakland if the Astros won their series in Seattle – they took two of three – it's unclear when he will do so.

As for third baseman Alex Bregman, also likely out for the remainder of the regular season because of a hamstring strain, Luhnow said, "He's working hard but those types of injuries take a while to resolve themselves."

"Every day we're seeing a little bit of progress and he certainly is champing at the bit wanting to be here and wanting to help these guys out," Luhnow said. "But (the) timeline is still not clear."

The Astros came into the weekend probably needing to win 11 of their last 13 games to have even a chance at the second wild card.

"I don't think anybody can complain if you're in the second half of September and every game means something," Luhnow said. "That's what we play for. For us, this is the playoffs. There's no guarantees beyond the end of the season. So we have to treat every game from now until the end like it's the most important game we're going to play the rest of the year."

Astros' David Paulino could still pitch in the AFL

By Jake Kaplan / Houston Chronicle

OAKLAND --- Depending on how many more innings he logs over the Astros' final 13 games, prospect David Paulino may still pitch in the Arizona Fall League.

Since losing his rotation spot to Brad Peacock following his uninspiring Sept. 8 major league debut, Paulino has pitched only one inning in relief. Barring a change, the 22-year-old righthander's role the rest of the season will be minimal, so his arm should be fresh enough for 25 or so more innings in the AFL.

"We're not ruling out the possibility of him going to get innings either in the AFL or potentially winter ball if we feel that that's in his best interests," Astros general manager Jeff Luhnow said on Monday.

Paulino has racked up only 94 innings this season between Class AA, Class AAA and the major leagues. He was among the original Astros contingent slated to play for the Glendale Desert Dogs of the AFL but was removed from the roster after his surprise promotion to the Astros.

The experience of pitching in the prospect-laden AFL would be valuable for Paulino, who clearly needs more development time. Each team gets to tab one starting pitcher among its AFL contingent. Paulino had been the Astros.

Francis Martes, the Astros' top pitching, headlines the organization's group of prospects to take part in the AFL, which begins Oct. 11. Catcher Garrett Stubbs and outfielders Ramon Laureano and Jason Martin are also on the Glendale roster.

Despite righty on mound, Teoscar Hernandez gets start
By Jake Kaplan / Houston Chronicle

But unlike his two starts over the weekend in Seattle, Hernandez's inclusion in the lineup for the Astros' series opener in Oakland was notable.

Despite a righthander on the mound for the Athletics in rookie Jharel Cotton, Astros manager A.J. Hinch started the right-handed hitting Hernandez over either of his left-handed options, Colby Rasmus and Tony Kemp.

The reason, Hinch explained, stemmed from Cotton's repertoire and the pitcher's reverse splits.

Said Hinch: "Cotton's got a really good changeup. He doesn't spin the ball a ton. And a small sample in the big leagues has confirmed his minor league track record of handling lefties a little better than righties. So, I'm trying to take away a little bit of his changeup usage in putting some right-handed hitters in there."

In the 12 major league innings Cotton had thrown entering Monday, left-handed hitters were 1 for 18 (.056) against him while right-handed hitters were 8 for 27 (.296).

Odds & ends

--- The Astros plan to stay in rotation for this week's four-game series against the Angels at Minute Maid Park, as Mike Fiers, Doug Fister, Brad Peacock and Joe Musgrove are scheduled to start against Los Angeles.

--- The Astros' instructional league for rookie-ball level minor leaguers begins this week at the team's spring training facility in Kissimmee, Fla.

Astros' Lance McCullers up for Marvin Miller Man of Year award

By Jake Kaplan / Houston Chronicle

OAKLAND - Astros starting pitcher Lance McCullers was voted by fans as the American League West's representative on the Marvin Miller Man of the Year award ballot.

Major League players will vote on the overall winner as part of the 2016 Players Choice Awards ballots distributed Sept. 20. The Marvin Miller Man of the Year award is presented annually "to the player whose on-field performance and contributions to his community most inspire others to higher levels of achievement."

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Rob Refsnyder of the Yankees, David Robertson of the White Sox, Anthony Rizzo of the Cubs, Curtis Granderson of the Mets and Justin Turner of the Dodgers are the other five divisional winners.

Adam Jones of the Orioles garnered the 2015 Marvin Miller Man of the Year award honors. The award, named after the late longtime executive director of the MLB players' association, was first presented in 1997.

Astros score twice in 9th to beat Athletics 4-2

By: Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- A big pinch-hit double by seldom-used Tyler White in the eighth inning and little discipline at the plate by Marwin Gonzalez in the ninth provided just enough to keep the Houston Astros on the fringe of the AL wild card race.

Manager A.J. Hinch's ballclub might be down -- three games, in fact -- but they're certainly not out.

White hit a game-tying double in the eighth and Gonzalez followed with a two-run single off Ryan Madson in the ninth and the Astros came from behind to beat the Oakland Athletics 4-2 on Monday night.

"We need them all, I loved how our team hung in there until the end," Hinch said. "Some of the biggest at-bats were when the game was on the line. I liked how we gutted it out."

Houston remains three games behind Baltimore and Toronto in the race for the AL wild card spots. Two other teams, Detroit and Seattle, are also in front of the Astros.

"We're fighting to the end," Gonzalez said. "Nobody's quitting. We've got to fight until the end."

The Astros trailed 2-1 going into the eighth inning but tied it on White's RBI-double then they scored twice in the ninth to keep their slim playoff hopes alive.

Jose Altuve and Carlos Correa opened the inning with singles. After Evan Gattis was intentionally walked, Gonzalez lined the first pitch from Madson (5-7) into center field to drive in Altuve and Correa.

"He didn't get too big," Hinch said of his switch-hitting first baseman. "Sometimes our guys, they want to win so badly, you want to be the guy, we can come out of our swing a little bit. Not tonight."

Correa finished with two hits while Gattis hit his 28th home run of the season to help the Astros to their fifth straight win over the A's.

Former Oakland reliever Luke Gregerson (4-1) retired three batters for the win. Ken Giles pitched the ninth for his 12th save.

Ryon Healy and Bruce Maxwell hit solo home runs for the A's, who had won six of seven before the bullpen allowed three runs in two innings and wasted a strong start by rookie Jharel Cotton.

Cotton allowed one run over six innings. The right-hander retired 18 of the 20 batters he faced, allowing Gattis' home run in the second. He struck out six.

"Every time out he looks like the same guy," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "He's locating all his pitches, his changeup in any count, and his curveball was probably better today than we've seen it. He pitched great."

CLOSING IN ON 200 AGAIN

Altuve went 1 for 4, leaving him one hit shy of 200. Altuve is attempting to become the first player since Ichiro Suzuki to have 200 or more hits in three consecutive seasons.

PEACOCK CAN STRUT

Houston starter Brad Peacock allowed two runs over 5 1/3 innings, walked two and struck out two. Peacock, who was the A's top pitching prospect before being traded to the Astros in 2013, extended his career-long streak for allowing three earned runs or fewer to 10 consecutive games. The streak dates to 2014.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Athletics: RHP Sonny Gray (strained right forearm) will throw a bullpen session Tuesday and if all goes well, the Oakland ace will face hitters in his next step of rehab. The team is still hopeful of getting Gray into a game before the end of the season. ... Henderson Alvarez will undergo a second surgery on his right shoulder Tuesday. Alvarez has not pitched in the majors since May 22, 2015. ... 1B/OF Mark Canha will begin hitting off a tee as he attempts to return from a back strain that has kept him out since May 9.

UP NEXT

Astros: RHP Joe Musgrove (3-4) starts against Oakland on Tuesday. The rookie beat the A's earlier this season when he pitched 5 1/3 scoreless innings.

Athletics: LHP Sean Manaea (6-9) makes his second start since missing 15 days with a strained left rhomboid.

Elias Says...

By: Elias Sports Bureau, Inc. / Special to ESPN.com

Betts blasts off in Baltimore yet again

Mookie Betts hammered a two-run homer off Dylan Bundy to put the Red Sox on the scoreboard in their victory over the Orioles at Camden Yards. The longball was the eighth home run for Betts in Baltimore this season, making him the second player in the last 35 seasons to hit eight homers in a season at a visiting ballpark. The other player to do so in that span was Sammy Sosa, who homered eight times at Minute Maid Park in Houston in the 2001 campaign. Only one Red Sox player prior to Betts homered eight or more times at a visiting ballpark in a season. In 1939, Jimmie Foxx hit eight home runs for the Red Sox at Sportsman's Park in St. Louis.

The Red Sox have two more games left to play in Baltimore this season, giving Betts a chance at the all-time mark for most home runs as a visitor in a ballpark. That record is currently held by Hall-of-Famer Harry Heilmann, who homered 10 times at Shibe Park in Philadelphia in 1922.

Porcello reaches 21 wins with efficiency

Rick Porcello needed only 89 pitches to complete nine innings against the Orioles and notch his majors-leading 21st win of the season. Only one Orioles player saw more than five pitches in an at-bat versus Porcello on Monday - Mark Trumbo worked the count full before striking out to end the sixth inning. Only one other pitcher since the start of last season threw fewer than 90 pitches in a game while going at least nine innings. Jeff Samardzija threw 88 pitches in a complete-game shutout for the White Sox on Sept. 21, 2015 at Detroit.

Same old story for Giants relievers as Dodgers walk off

A brilliant performance by Madison Bumgarner went for naught on Monday as the Dodgers plated two runs in the bottom of the ninth inning to walk off with the win against the Giants. San Francisco has lost a franchise-record nine games this season in which it led entering the ninth inning, and five of those losses have been this month: Sept. 4 at the Cubs, Sept. 7 at Colorado, Sept. 13 versus San Diego, and Sept. 17 versus St. Louis.

Only four other teams in major-league history had at least five losses within a calendar month in which they led at the end of eight innings. Those four teams - the Phillies (May 1936), Indians (July 1974), Mariners (July 1991), and Mets (Sept. 1992) - had exactly five losses of that kind in their respective months.

Bumgarner's brilliance blown by bullpen

Bumgarner had to settle for the no-decision despite allowing just one hit over seven scoreless innings. Monday's game marked the seventh time this season that Bumgarner did not earn a win after departing from a start with the Giants ahead. That's tied with the Marlins' Tom Koehler for the most blown wins by any starting pitcher this season. Since the franchise relocated to San Francisco in 1958, only two other Giants pitchers had at least seven potential wins blown by the bullpen in a season. John Montefusco had seven blown wins for San Francisco in 1978, and Orel Hershiser had eight such starts for the Giants in 1998.

Bumgarner struck out 10 Dodgers batters on Monday night, bringing his total to 241 strikeouts on the season. The only left-handed pitcher in franchise history with more strikeouts in a season was Cy Seymour, who led the National League with 244 strikeouts in 1898.

Cubs rally via the longball

Thanks to home runs from Addison Russell, Wilson Contreras, and Jason Heyward, the Cubs rallied for three runs in the seventh inning and two more in the eighth to clinch a 5-2 comeback victory over the Reds at Wrigley Field. The Cubs have won nine games this season in which they trailed by multiple runs in the seventh inning or later. That's the most wins of that kind among National League teams; only the Rangers (12) and Mariners (11) have more such wins this year.

Reds enter record books for the wrong reason

Jason Heyward's home run in the bottom of the eighth inning at Wrigley Field was the 242nd homer allowed by Reds pitching this season. That's the most home runs allowed in a season by a team in major-league history. The Tigers held the previous mark, having allowed 241 home runs in 1996. Prior to Monday's game, Cincinnati had been tied for the high among National League clubs with the Rockies, who allowed 239 homers in 2001.

Rangers walk off with another one-run win

Ian Desmond singled home Elvis Andrus with the game-winning run in the bottom of the ninth to give the Rangers their majors-leading 35th one-run win of the season. Texas improved to 17-3 (.850) this season in games decided by the minimum margin against opponents from the AL West. Only three other teams since 1969 won at least 85 percent of their one-run decisions against divisional foes in a season. Two teams did so in the strike-shortened 1981 campaign: the Orioles (8-1, .889) and Reds (17-3, .850). The other team to do so in the divisional era was the 1996 Cardinals (13-2, .867).

Ichiro finding success in a pinch

Pinch hitter Ichiro Suzuki drove in the go-ahead run for the Marlins in their comeback victory over the Nationals at Marlins Park. Including Monday's game-winner, Ichiro has driven in at least one run in each of his four pinch-hit plate appearances this month. No other active player has had a streak of four or more pinch-hit plate appearances with at least one RBI. Ichiro leads the Marlins with eight pinch-hit RBIs this season, which is twice as many pinch-hit RBIs he had in his major-league career entering this season (four from 2001 to 2015).

Hosmer racking up rib-eyes versus White Sox

Eric Hosmer's RBI-single in the fifth inning gave the Royals the lead for good against the White Sox. Including his two RBIs from Monday's win, Hosmer drove in 23 runs versus the White Sox this season. That's the second-highest RBI total against a team for a Royals player in a single season. George Brett holds the record for Kansas City, having totaled 24 RBIs against the Rangers in the 1985 season. The only major-league player with more RBIs than Hosmer versus a team this season is the A's Kris Davis, who has driven in 24 runs against the Rangers.

Ventura hit hard but goes the distance

Yordano Ventura pitched all nine innings against the White Sox despite allowing nine hits and three runs. The previous four Royals pitchers to allow at least nine hits in a complete game did so in a losing effort - Jeremy Guthrie (2013), Kyle Davies (2009), Zack Greinke (2005), and Jeff Suppan (2002). The last Royals pitcher before Ventura to allow at least nine hits in a complete-game win was Paul Byrd, who gave up 10 hits in a 5-3 victory on July 18, 2002 against the White Sox.

Bottom of order does damage for Cardinals

The bottom two of the batting order produced two big hits for the Cardinals in their 5-3 win over the Rockies at Coors Field. Randal Grichuk put St. Louis on the scoreboard with a two-run homer in the third inning, and Carlos Martinez drove in two insurance runs in the next inning with a double. Monday's game marked the third time this season that the starting eighth and ninth hitters for the Cardinals each recorded multiple RBIs in the same game. That also happened on April 27 at Arizona (Aledmys Diaz and Adam Wainwright) and May 2 versus Philadelphia (Kolten Wong and Wainwright). The Cardinals had only two games of that kind in the previous 11 seasons combined, doing so once in 2006 and 2012.

Rockies pitchers walking it out

Tyler Anderson didn't issue any walks from the mound in seven innings of work for the Rockies against the Cardinals, but he drew two bases on balls in three appearances at the plate. That's the second consecutive game for the Rockies in which their starting pitcher coaxed multiple walks as a batter - Chad Bettis also walked twice for Colorado on Sunday versus the Padres. In the last 50 years, the only other time a team's starting pitcher drew multiple walks as a batter in consecutive games was in April 1981, when the Expos' Steve Rogers and Ray Burris each walked twice in back-to-back games against the Mets.

Braves' future looking a little brighter thanks to Swanson

Dansby Swanson drove in three runs on three hits in the Braves' 7-3 victory over the Mets at Citi Field. The 22-year-old rookie drove in Atlanta's first run with a single in the second inning, singled and scored in the fourth inning, then capped the scoring for the Braves with a two-run single in the seventh. Since 1920, when RBIs were first officially recorded, only two other players totaled at least three hits and three RBIs in a game as a shortstop for the Braves at age 22 or younger. Jeff Blauser was 21 years old when he had three hits and four RBIs for Atlanta on Sept. 22, 1987 versus the Astros. The other to do so was Andrelton Simmons, who was 22 years old (but an "older 22" than Swanson) when he posted a three-hit, three-RBI game at Miami on June 5, 2012.

Gonzalez delivers with bases loaded for Astros

Marwin Gonzalez followed an intentional walk to Evan Gattis in the ninth inning with a two-run single to give the Astros their winning margin over the A's. Gonzalez has stroked a hit in three of his last four at-bats with the bases loaded after starting his career 3-for-30 in that situation.

A's won't make it easy for playoff-contending Astros

By: Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- The Houston Astros are no strangers to nerve-wracking wild-card playoff races.

Last year, they didn't clinch the American League's second wild-card berth until the final day of the regular season, finishing one game ahead of the Los Angeles Angels.

This year, the Astros are in what shapes up to be an even tougher wild-card race.

The Astros are three games behind the Toronto Blue Jays and Baltimore Orioles, who are tied atop the wild-card standings. Detroit trails by 2 1/2 games, and Seattle is tied with Houston.

Houston needed a come-from-behind, 4-2 victory against the Oakland A's on Monday night to prevent losing ground. The Astros will face the A's again Tuesday night at the Oakland Coliseum.

"I think our guys are comfortable playing in important game," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "We played an entire month in September last year and into October where it was very similar to this year, where every game was magnified, every detail within the game is magnified.

"Most of these guys are very comfortable in their own skin to play in these type of games. I think it has to help. It certainly doesn't hurt. We've been there before. We've seen the schedule have to play out all the way to the last game before we clinched last year, and we'll have to play even better down the stretch this season to factor in."

The Astros are facing a young A's team that has been eliminated from playoff contention but showed how dangerous it can be by going 6-1 on its recent road trip against Kansas City and Texas. The A's batted .318 and scored 65 runs, sweeping four games from the Royals and going 2-1 against the Rangers.

Rookies such as third baseman Ryon Healy, second baseman Joey Wendle and catcher Bruce Maxwell have helped energize the A's. Healy and Maxwell each hit a solo home run Monday.

"Anytime you're winning the vibe's going to be upbeat," Wendle said. "That's the goal every game, to come out and win and compete. It's been really fun for me to be part of this, kind of joining some of my teammates from (Triple-A) Nashville and then the guys that have been here for a while. Some of the veterans have just been great. They're really leading the younger guys and kind of showing us the ropes. It's been fun."

Hinch said the A's are playing "loose," which makes them dangerous.

"This time of the year when you play a team that's out of contention, that's got some new blood in their lineup, it can be a little bit of a challenge, because they don't have a ton of anxiety around them," Hinch said.

"They've got some guys that are trying to make a case to make their team next season or become interesting over the offseason, and there are a lot of new names. It doesn't surprise me that (A's manager) Bob (Melvin) keeps it loose and keeps them playing hard. They're hungry to do some things. If you're not going to be in it, you want to beat the teams that are."

A's left-hander Sean Manaea will face Astros right-hander Joe Musgrove in a battle of rookies.

Musgrove (3-4, 4.71) pitched 5 1/3 scoreless innings in a 6-0 victory against Manaea (6-9, 4.23) and the A's on Aug. 29. Manaea left the game after 3 1/3 innings because of a strained upper back, but returned to action Wednesday and pitched five scoreless innings in an 8-0 victory at Kansas City.

Musgrove will make his 10th career major league appearance and ninth career start since being recalled from Triple-A Fresno. In his last start on Wednesday, he allowed three runs over 6 1/3 innings in an 8-4 victory against Texas. He struck out seven and walked two.

"I've had moments up here of joy and happiness and I've had some real tough ones as well," Musgrove said. "Adapting and learning and making the little adjustments that are necessary."

County agrees to help fund downtown baseball stadium

By Steve DeVane / FayObserver

Cumberland County commissioners unanimously approved a resolution Monday to provide funding for a proposed baseball stadium in downtown Fayetteville.

Commissioners also discussed in closed session how the county might be able to help the city keep a Wilmington businessman from opening a 1,300-vehicle salvage yard near the Cape Fear River. The City Council voted 6-4 last week to approve a settlement agreement with Marc Vanover, who had threatened to file a lawsuit when the city told him in May that his 2015 special use permit had expired after one year.

Marshall Faircloth, chairman of the Board of Commissioners, said the board is happy that the county can support the baseball stadium. He said the county will not be a partner owning equity in the ballpark, but will help with financing.

The resolution says the county will provide increased revenue from a special tax district for the stadium. Faircloth said commissioners would consider approval of the agreement after city and county officials work out the exact parameters for the district.

The resolution says the agreement would be contingent on the county school board agreeing to eliminate the increased tax revenue from a funding agreement the school system has with the county.

County Manager Amy Cannon and Faircloth met with school officials about the issue. She said the school board is expected to approve the revenue being left out of the funding agreement.

The resolution passed by commissioners calls for the county to provide 100 percent of the county's part of the increased tax revenue to the project for five years and 75 percent for another 15 years.

City officials expect \$60 million in private investment to spring up around the stadium, which will be built behind the former Prince Charles Hotel.

A financial model approved by the City Council for the \$33 million stadium includes money from the county. The city plans to use its portion of increased tax revenue and lease payments from the facility for the project.

The city also expects to set aside \$7 million to help make up some of the debt payments after borrowing money for the stadium. The city would pay back the debt over 30 years.

The city-owned Public Works Commission is expected to provide part of the up-front money. The PWC agreed earlier this year to provide the city with \$1.2 million a year for five years for economic development.

The City Council voted unanimously last month in favor of a nonbinding memorandum of understanding that would have the Houston Astros field a minor league baseball team in the city starting next spring. A 30-year stadium lease would start with occupation of the facility in 2019.

City Councilman Kirk deViere, who was at the commissioners' meeting Monday, said the resolution is an example of how the city and county can work together on economic development.

"Hopefully, we're setting a blueprint on how the city and county can work together for economic development going forward," he said.

Faircloth said the county and city have a similar agreement that provides funding for a parking deck.

"It's a painless way for the county to participate in a city project," he said. "We always felt like we could cooperate on economic development because we've got a common interest."

Faircloth said he talked with commissioners during an 11-minute closed session about how the county might be able to help facilitate the city's effort to build a river park.

The city plans to build a \$6.3 million river park off Person Street with funds from a parks bond issue passed by voters in March. The park would be about four city blocks from the salvage yard that Vanover wants to open.

Faircloth said the county may have property on which it had foreclosed that might be suitable for the salvage yard. He said he does not know what the City Council discussed in closed session about the facility before it voted to allow it to go forward.

"Our thoughts were they were kind of over a barrel on what they could do," he said.

Opponent Clips - at OAK

Maxwell shines with max effort, first homer

By Rick Eymer / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Bruce Maxwell chews gum the way he plays baseball: at full speed and aggressively.

The first baseman-turned-catcher is also articulate, thoughtful and communicates well with his teammates. He just plays the game hard.

Maxwell caught Athletics rookie Jharel Cotton for the first time at any level. He's faced him a few times, though, and recognized the same stuff Cotton used to throw two-hit ball over six innings in the A's 4-2 loss to the Astros on Monday night.

"It's a lot better when we're wearing the same uniform," Maxwell said. "I faced him earlier in the year in Nashville when he pitched for Oklahoma City. He gave up one run in seven innings. He looks the same."

Maxwell has never shown much power through his career, but he hit his first Major League home run, an opposite-field shot against Astros starter Brad Peacock.

"That's where a lot of my power is," Maxwell said. "It felt good to finally get one."

He also hustled to catch a pair of foul balls in front of the Astros' dugout, both of which appeared uncatchable off the bat. Maxwell knew the Coliseum, though, and knew he had a chance at each.

"It's about studying the park and knowing how much room there is," he said. "Then going after it."

Cotton said the chemistry with Maxwell was great.

"He put down good signs, made sure I took a deep breath between pitches and he made two great plays I was fortunate to see," Cotton said. "It was pretty cool."

Maxwell and Cotton, both part of a youth movement in Oakland, are showing they belong at this level.

"Cotton pitched great," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "In Maxy's case, going the other way like that, he's starting to show some power."

Hanley, Khris share AL Player of the Week

By Daniel Kramer / MLB.com

A power barrage last week led to American League Player of the Week honors for Hanley Ramirez and Khris Davis.

Each belted five homers, and they combined for 25 RBIs and posted the two highest OPS marks in the AL -- 1.594 and 1.571, respectively.

• Past winners

Ramirez led the Red Sox to a four-game sweep of the Yankees -- highlighted by a walk-off home run on Thursday in a game they trailed by three runs heading into the ninth -- to give Boston a three-game cushion atop the AL East.

This is the fourth Player of the Week nod for Ramirez, who also received the distinction the week of July 24, his first time getting the honor in the AL. He twice received the honors in the National League in 2007 and '09 with the Marlins.

With 106 RBIs on the year, Ramirez is just two home runs shy of his first career 30-100 season. He's enjoyed much more success and has remained healthy in 2016, his second year in Boston, as his average is up 45 points to .294 and he's played in all but 13 games.

This is the first career Player of the Week honor for Davis, 28, who is playing in his third full season and first in Oakland.

With two homers on Sunday, Davis became just the fifth A's player and the first since 2000 to belt 40 big flies in a season -- joining the likes of Jason Giambi (who won the AL MVP Award that year), Mark McGwire (who did so twice), Reggie Jackson and Jose Canseco.

Over the weekend, Davis led the A's to a series win over the first-place Rangers, in which he went 5-for-11 with three homers, three walks and five RBIs.

Gray progressing, hopes to pitch this season

A's righty out since Aug. 6 with forearm injury

By Rick Eymier / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Right-hander Sonny Gray still hopes to pitch again this season and he may not be that far off.

Gray is scheduled to throw another bullpen session on Tuesday and if he feels good afterward, he will advance to facing hitters.

"Hopefully it gets to the point we get him into a game," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "I'm not sure if it will be a start; we haven't figured that out yet."

Gray, out since Aug. 6 with a muscle strain and inflammation in his forearm, threw 30 pitches in his last bullpen session. He has struggled this season at 5-11 with a 5.74 ERA and he'd like to finish the season with some solid appearances before heading into the offseason.

Worth noting

- Right-hander Henderson Alvarez will undergo surgery on his right shoulder on Tuesday.
- Mark Canha, who underwent hip surgery in May, is expected to hit off a tee on Tuesday.