



Clips
(October 4, 2009)

From the Los Angeles Times

ANGELS 4, OAKLAND 2

Scott Kazmir is sharp, Jason Bulger has a scare

Starter throws five shutout innings for Angels, but reliever leaves game after feeling tightness in shoulder.

By Mike DiGiovanna
October 4, 2009

Reporting from Oakland - A shoulder injury to reliever Jason Bulger on the eve of the playoffs put a slight damper on a sharp outing by left-hander Scott Kazmir, who gave up three hits in five shutout innings in the Angels' 4-2 victory over the Oakland Athletics on Saturday.

Bulger, who is 6-1 with a 3.56 earned-run average in 64 games, gave up a walk, a run-scoring triple to Eric Patterson and struck out two batters in the eighth inning before signaling to the bench that he felt tightness in the front of his shoulder.

He came out of the game.

"They didn't want to risk injury; it's more precautionary," said Bulger, who sat out a week and a half in late August and early September because of tightness in the back of his shoulder. "I'm not concerned. The good thing is I have a couple of days to rest up and get ready for Boston."

Bulger has been pitching in the sixth, seventh and eighth innings.

If his shoulder doesn't respond well over the next few days, Ervin Santana would assume more of a late-inning relief role, and Jose Arredondo would be added to the playoff roster.

"He felt a little twinge in the shoulder; he probably has a little tendinitis," Manager Mike Scioscia said. "We'll evaluate it and see how he progresses. If it calms down, he should be OK for the playoffs. But it's certainly something the training staff will watch real closely."

Kazmir, who is expected to start Game 3 of the American League division series against the Red Sox in Fenway Park, was very encouraged by Saturday's start, in which he found the slider that had deserted him in recent games.

"For the most part, I threw a lot of good sliders today, especially against left-handers," said Kazmir, who is 2-2 with a 1.73 ERA in six starts for the Angels since his Aug. 28 trade from Tampa Bay. "I had a good feel for it."

Injury updates

Shortstop Erick Aybar, who sat out two games because of a bruised right hand, and second baseman Howie Kendrick, who sat out three games because of an infection below his right knee, each returned Saturday.

But utility infielder Maicer Izturis remained sidelined for a second consecutive day because of an injury to the outside of his left knee, suffered when he tripped over Texas first baseman Andruw Jones on Thursday in Anaheim.

Izturis, who starts at second base against right-handers and can also play shortstop and third base, could play in today's regular-season finale. Scioscia does not believe the injury will affect Izturis' availability in the playoffs.

Izturis, who is batting .300 with eight home runs and 65 runs batted in, sat out the playoffs last season because of a thumb injury.

The switch-hitter would have been an attractive option to replace the struggling Aybar or Kendrick.

"Not having him was tough," Scioscia said. "He can bring a lot to our lineup."

Aybar had three singles and scored twice Saturday. Kendrick was hitless in four at-bats and turned a double play.

Reserve corps

Utility man Robb Quinlan, who plays the corner infield and outfield spots, appeared to solidify a spot on the playoff roster with a sharp single in his only at-bat Friday night and a two-run single and a run-scoring double Saturday.

Whatever shot Brandon Wood had of snagging that final roster spot may have evaporated with three-strikeout games Thursday and Friday. Wood singled in the seventh inning Saturday -- and was picked off first base by reliever Brad Ziegler.

Wood is a better athlete with more power than Quinlan, but Quinlan showed this weekend why he could be more valuable as a reserve in a short series -- the veteran can give the Angels a quality at-bat after not playing for long periods.

"He might go a couple of weeks without an at-bat, but he has the ability to go out there and put the barrel on the ball," Scioscia said. "He would have more playing time [on other teams], but that's the role he has here, and he's done a terrific job."

Red Sox relieved

Boston had a little shortstop scare of its own Friday when Alex Gonzalez, who has solidified the defense since his Aug. 14 trade from Cincinnati, was hit on the right wrist by a 93-mph Kerry Wood fastball.

Initial X-rays were inconclusive, and there was a fear that a line on the scan was a hairline fracture. But X-rays Saturday morning were negative, and Gonzalez is expected to be ready for the division series.

Short hops

Right fielder Bobby Abreu became the fifth player in history to have five seasons with 100 runs batted in and 30 stolen bases. The others -- Honus Wagner (seven times), Hugh Duffy and Barry Bonds (six times) and Ty Cobb (five times) are all Hall of Fame members. . . . Gary Matthews Jr. had a run-scoring double in the fourth inning Saturday.

From the Orange County Register

Saturday, October 3, 2009

Angels victory comes with a scare

Bulger experiences tightness in his shoulder during victory over A's, 4-2.

By BILL PLUNKETT

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

OAKLAND - Completely healthy, the Angels' bullpen would still be their greatest area of concern heading into the postseason.

Now, add this.

Jason Bulger was pulled from the eighth inning of Saturday's 4-2 victory over the Oakland A's when he developed tightness in the front of his shoulder.

Bulger struck out two of the four batters he faced but also gave up a walk and an RBI triple. When Angels pitching coach Mike Butcher came out to the mound to check on him, Butcher wound up calling for a pitching change instead.

"He just felt a little tightness in his shoulder," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said.

"Butch went out just to give him a little breather and make sure he was okay. Jason told him his shoulder was bothering him a little. At that point, we decided enough's enough."

Bulger's problem comes one game after another key part of the Angels' bullpen, Kevin Jepsen, retired just one of the four batters he faced in the eighth inning.

"We just wanted to be safe. It's more of a precautionary thing," Bulger said afterward. "It was really just kind of a tight day. Just some fatigue and tightness, I guess."

Bulger was shut down for 10 days at the end of August and early September after another shoulder problem flared up. He said this discomfort is in a different location, in the front of his shoulder.

Bulger has thrown 65 2/3 innings this season, his heaviest workload since he entered professional baseball in 2002 and was a starter in rookie ball. He is second to Brian Fuentes for the most relief appearances on the team (64) and Darren Oliver for the most relief innings.

Scioscia has eased back on Bulger since his shoulder flare-up in August, using him for more than an inning just once in 12 appearances since then (and for less than an inning five times).

"I'm not concerned," Bulger said. "The good thing is we've got a couple days to rest it up, get some treatment and get ready for Boston."

Scioscia echoed that, saying Bulger's shoulder soreness didn't seem to be "anything extreme" and that it should be "calmed down before we start the playoffs."

However, it could elevate Ervin Santana's role pitching out of the bullpen in the playoffs and give the Angels reason to re-think their decision to go with a 10-man pitching staff for the ALDS. Scioscia has indicated the roster will be set following Sunday's game.

KAZMIR STRONG AGAIN

Like Jered Weaver on Friday, Scott Kazmir threw five shutout innings and allowed just three hits in his final pre-playoff tune-up Saturday.

Kazmir heads into his anticipated Game 3 start against the Red Sox next Sunday with a 1.73 ERA in six starts since being acquired by the Angels.

"It was a situation where he had a lot of blank canvas to work on some things for next week," Scioscia said. "Part of that was his slider and he did that. I think he got everything you'd hope for out of that game."

With Joe Saunders set to make his final tune-up start in the regular-season finale Sunday, Angels starting pitchers have not allowed a run in four of their past six games and have a 2.50 ERA over the past 33 games. Since August 28, the Angels starters collective ERA for the season has gone from 12th in the American League to fourth.

NOTES

Robb Quinlan drove in three runs with a two-run single and a double in Saturday's victory, cementing his spot on the bench for the playoffs. ... Scioscia is the first manager in baseball history to guide his team to the post-season six times in his first 10 seasons as manager. ... The Angels are finalizing plans for their pre-game festivities before next week's playoff games, including first-pitch ceremonies. The Adenhardt family might attend a game during the postseason but will not be included in any on-field event.

SUNDAY'S GAME

Saunders (15-7, 4.62) is scheduled to start against A's right-hander Edgar Gonzalez (0-4, 5.51). Game time is 1:05 p.m. and it will be broadcast on FSN, KLAA/830 and KWKW/1330 (in Spanish).

Saturday, October 3, 2009

Teammate lives in Angels' hearts

Nick Adenhardt's life, death continue to resonate with ballclub.

By MARK SAXON

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

ANAHEIM - Teams play virtually every day during the six-month baseball season. At times, it seems endless enough to swallow them up. Players and managers often refer to the 162-game season as a marathon, a grind or an endurance test.

Issues that seem pertinent in late March rarely seem to matter much by October, usually replaced by other concerns.

But the half-year that has passed since the death of 22-year-old pitcher Nick Adenhardt until the opening of the Angels' playoff series against the Boston Red Sox this week wasn't long enough to alter the team's feelings.

Adenhardt's death shadowed its every move early in the season. It has remained the emotional theme as the Angels try to get through the postseason's opening round for the first time in four years.

When emotions bubbled over, it led to a very public display of how they felt.

The players rallied around Adenhardt's jersey during their playoff-clinching victory last week, soaking it in beer and champagne. Plenty of cameras were there to capture it. The gesture struck some people as ill-conceived, because Adenhardt was killed in a collision involving a driver police say was drunk.

In the rough-and-tumble culture of baseball, it just felt like brotherly love.

"When you have a tragedy or a loss that affects a team member, they are going to remain part of your thoughts. You can't put a timetable on it," said Dr. Casey Cooper, who hosts a twice-weekly sports psychology show on the Angels' flagship radio station. "Some people are motivated by that. Other people need to deal with it so it doesn't paralyze them.

"The reality of them celebrating so strongly is because he was on their minds."

It sounds trite to say Adenhardt remains with the Angels this October, but there are ways in which he does.

For pitcher Jered Weaver, who expected to room with Adenhardt this season, the young pitcher lives in his dreams. Every so often, Adenhardt shows up randomly, as characters are wont to do in dreams.

"It hasn't been any scary situations. He just pops in and has one of his funny comments

and then that's about it," Weaver said. "It's nice to be able to wake up to that every once in a while."

Manager Mike Scioscia made a decision in the early days of the crisis. The Angels would embrace Adenhardt's memory without exploiting it.

Scioscia has been steadfast. This tragedy isn't about the Angels. It's about Adenhardt's family.

If you keep at Scioscia long enough, you get the sense this hasn't been an easy situation to navigate. You can't look up "deal with brilliant young pitcher's untimely death" in a leadership manual.

"We've been playing with heavy hearts the whole year," Scioscia said. "We have." The Angels carried his jersey with them on the road this year, just as they will when they arrive in Boston on Saturday.

Adenhardt's locker, tucked into a corner of the clubhouse reserved for rookie pitchers, looks much as it did after a strong, six-inning performance against the Oakland A's on April 8 that spoke loudly of his promise.

The Angels would never hear that voice again, because Andrew Thomas Gallo, whom police say was drunk when he shot his minivan through a red light, slammed into a car carrying Adenhardt and three other young people about 12:20 the following morning. Only one person in the car, former Cal State Fullerton catcher Jon Wilhite, survived.

The Angels didn't play well after Adenhardt's death, though nobody can say how much the tragedy contributed. They fell 5 1/2 games out of first place as they struggled through injuries.

On April 23, the team held a midday memorial at the stadium in which a few players and coaches, plus General Manager Tony Reagins, spoke. That night, the Angels beat the Detroit Tigers, 10-5. It sparked a 13-6 stretch that got them back in the race, one they ultimately controlled.

"One thing they said was, 'He was a competitor. Just remember that,'" center fielder Torii Hunter said. "For a whole month after he died, we were kind of like, 'Life is bigger than baseball.' You'd strike out and be like, 'Whatever.' If you lose a game, it's like, 'Whatever.'"

"We got to a point where we realized this guy played the game of baseball. He wanted us to go out there and win."

Cooper doesn't doubt that Adenhardt's death weighed on the Angels, causing missteps early in the season.

"One of the biggest misconceptions about sports is that athletes can perform consistently to their physical capabilities, regardless of what happens in their lives," Cooper said. "Some athletes are able to compartmentalize better than others, but we need to realize

these are whole people. Their physical performance is actually quite integrated with their emotional states."

While negotiating the travel hassles, bad weather and endless succession of flights that come with a major-league season, the Angels have made time to support Adenhardt's family.

Tim Mead, Angels vice president for communications, trades e-mails with members of all three victims' families. Pitching coach Mike Butcher gets text messages from Jim Adenhardt. The two men met in the hospital the morning Jim Adenhardt's son died.

Butcher said the fact that Jim Adenhardt is watching the Angels' games, cheering them on, is like "a little pat on the back."

"I'd be lying if I said there weren't days that were still emotional, especially sitting right next to his locker," said reliever Jason Bulger. "But, if anything, I guess it's something I've grown stronger through."

Fro the Press Enterprise

Kazmir goes 5 scoreless in tuneup

The Associated Press

OAKLAND - Scott Kazmir, acquired partly because of his success against Boston, tuned up for his Game 3 start in Boston next weekend with five shutout innings in a 4-2 win over Oakland on Saturday.

Kazmir (10-9) struck out three and didn't allow a runner past first in the first four innings. He gave up three hits, one of which was an infield single.

The lefty has allowed three earned runs or fewer in each of his past nine starts. He has a 1.73 ERA since being acquired from the Tampa Bay Rays.

"Scott threw the ball very well," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said. "It was a situation where he had a lot broader canvas to work on some things that he wanted to get in place for next week, and he did that. He got everything that you would hope for out of that outing."

Erick Aybar had three hits and scored twice in his return from a bruised wrist, and Robb Quinlan drove in three runs.

Kazmir also got some help from the Angels' defense, which turned a double play and caught two Oakland baserunners trying to steal.

After Matt Palmer pitched two scoreless innings, Jason Bulger walked Bobby Crosby leading off the eighth and gave up a triple to Eric Patterson. Rafael Rodriguez replaced

Bulger, who complained of tightness in his pitching shoulder, and gave up an RBI double to Davis.

There was no more detailed report on Bulger, who has been a key reliever.

Brian Fuentes pitched a scoreless ninth for his major league-leading 48th save as the Angels moved a season-high 31 games over .500. The Angels (96-65) have won six of the past seven. The A's have lost six straight.

Quinlan, who has played infrequently lately, isn't certain if he'll be on the Angels postseason roster, as he has been in previous years. But Scioscia values him.

"He would have more playing time in other situations, but right here that's the role that's available to him and he's done a terrific job with it," the manager said.

NOTES

The Angels-Red Sox series looks as if it will start on Thursday. The Yankees said Joba Chamberlain will pitch in relief today, an indication they will go with a three-man rotation in the first round. They can do that if their series starts on Wednesday, meaning the Angels would start on Thursday. The Yankees have the choice because they had the best AL record.

The Angels lead the league with 47 road wins.

A's pitchers struck out four to tie the franchise record of 1,117 set in 2001.

Weaver knows he can count on family

Angels rightly recounts support of big league brother

By Lyle Spencer / MLB.com

10/04/09 1:00 AM ET

OAKLAND -- Sunday is Jered Weaver's 27th birthday. It has been the best of seasons and the worst of seasons, a season to celebrate and a season to mourn.

Weaver gained new stature professionally, lifting his game to a higher level. He also lost one of his best friends. Nick Adenhart perished in the first week of the season after a horrendous car crash that also claimed friends Courtney Stewart and Nick Pearson and severely injured another passenger, Jon Wilhite.

In that darkest of hours, Weaver naturally turned to his family. His parents were there for him, and so was big brother Jeff, who has always been a guiding light, whether the man now pitching for the Dodgers realized it or not.

"Obviously, when something like that happens, that's where you go first -- to your family," Jered said. "I talked to my mom and dad, and to Jeff. It was a rough time, losing someone I was getting so close to. It's been very difficult, obviously, from that standpoint."

Another family -- his teammates -- also provided support for Weaver in the weeks that turned into months following the loss of the 22-year-old athlete who had the extraordinary gifts of pitching baseballs and making people feel good in his presence.

"Being around the guys, all of us going through the same thing, that helped us all get through it," Weaver said. "There was always somebody to talk to, and that helped out a lot."

It will be hard for any award he receives down the road to approach the emotional attachment Weaver will have to the inaugural Nick Adenhart Award, presented to him as the Angels' Pitcher of the Year on Wednesday at Angel Stadium.

"It's a tremendous honor," Weaver said. "Not only that teammates voted on it, but that it was named after Nick. "It's something I'll be able to hang up and remember him by.

"I'll be able to look at it and remember what a good person, teammate and friend he was."

Angels manager Mike Scioscia has applauded Weaver's work through 33 starts.

"Weav has been the rock of our rotation this year," Scioscia said. "He's made every start and always gives us a chance to win. So Weav getting the Nick Adenhart Award is very special."

Weaver's season is far from over. A major assignment looms in Game 2 of the American League Division Series against the Red Sox at Angel Stadium.

Like Ervin Santana this season, Weaver was the odd man out of the rotation last October -- but he didn't let it bother him. In fact, he flourished in relief, pitching two scoreless innings in Game 3 and claiming the lone Angels victory in the series at Fenway Park.

Weaver stepped up his game significantly this season, gaining natural physical maturity along with expanding awareness of the subtle aspects of his craft.

"He's done a better job of getting out of tough innings, moving on to the next one," said John Lackey, who is always a model for Weaver. "I've seen a lot of growth in Jered this season on the mound. It's good to see."

Weaver had career highs in wins (16, against eight losses) along with innings pitched (211), strikeouts (174), complete games (four) and shutouts (two).

His 3.75 ERA was inflated by several substandard outings when he was going through a dead-arm period after the All-Star break.

"Every year you're going to learn something," Weaver said. "My main goal this year was getting deeper in games. I think it helped the club a lot and helped the bullpen by being able to get deeper in games, throw more innings.

"It's a good feeling any time you can stay healthy through a season. We had some injuries -- and the tragedy with Nick -- and I was able to stay out there and keep us in games. It was a good feeling to do that."

Obviously, for family reasons, the Angels' Pitcher of the Year would love to see brother Jeff, the artful Dodger, in a Freeway Series. But that is getting ahead of a story that is still being written, with a dramatic opening act on tap with the band of Bostonians who have treated the Angels so rudely in recent seasons.

Kazmir mows down A's in ALDS tuneup

Lefty lowers ERA since joining Angels to 1.73 in victory
By Lyle Spencer / MLB.com

10/03/09 8:00 PM ET

OAKLAND -- This was more like it for Scott Kazmir.

The Angels scored some runs for him, and -- way more important in the big scheme -- he stood tall and had smooth rhythm on his slider, snapping it sharply and putting it in the right places.

Tuning up for his projected Game 3 start in the American League Division Series in Boston, Kazmir delivered five shutout innings in the Angels' 4-2 verdict over the Athletics on Saturday in front of 16,539 at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum.

"I'm trying to stand tall and get downward action with later break, sharper break," Kazmir said. "It's all about balance. I can't throw the slider before my arm is ready. If you do, you don't get good extension. By standing tall, I'm staying back, and that's giving me the balance I need.

"For the most part, it felt good. I threw a lot of sliders, especially to left-handers. And my changeup was good. All in all, for everything, it was the best I've felt since I've been here."

Right on time, with the Red Sox in the on-deck circle.

Robb Quinlan and Erick Aybar were the primary offensive weapons in support of Kazmir, who shaved his ERA in six starts for the Angels to 1.73 by yielding only three hits and one walk while striking out three men.

"What got me out of trouble [in previous starts] was fastball command," Kazmir said. "I was able to work both sides and show the offspeed."

This time, he was able to put hitters away with the slider, striking out Landon Powell in the second inning with it and Eric Patterson in the third. All four pitches Kazmir threw to Patterson were breakers.

"Sometimes you have to give the other team credit," said A's catalyst Rajai Davis, who had an infield hit in three at-bats against Kazmir. "The Angels do have a good pitching staff, and Kazmir's right at the top of the list as far as I'm concerned."

Jason Bulger, taking over in the eighth, left the game with a twinge in his right shoulder after striking out two men and surrendering a run on a walk and triple by Patterson. Davis' double against Rafael Rodriguez scored Patterson.

"With a couple of days to rest it up, I'll be OK," said Bulger, who has been a workhorse in the bullpen all season. "I didn't want to pitch through something that could turn into an injury. You don't want to come out of a game, but I'm not concerned about it. I'll be ready to go."

Brian Fuentes nailed down his Major League-high 48th save, shaving his ERA to 3.93.

Kazmir is 10-9 for the season and 2-2 with the Angels, who had scored only eight runs while he was working in his previous five outings.

Underscoring the high quality of his work in his new environment, the 26-year-old lefty has allowed only 37 baserunners and seven runs in 36 1/3 innings, striking out 26 while walking only nine.

"It was a situation where he had a lot broader canvas to work on some things he wanted to get in place for next weekend," Angels manager Mike Scioscia said.

"He threw a good amount of sliders, and he definitely threw some good ones. He got everything you would hope to get out of that outing. It should have him set up for next week."

Quinlan, finding his rhythm for a bench role in the postseason, drove in three runs with a single and double. Aybar drilled three singles, scoring twice. Juan Rivera also had two hits, and Gary Matthews Jr. delivered an RBI double.

"I might not get to play a lot," Quinlan said, "but when I do, I try to make things happen. I got some opportunities with guys on base, and I got some hits. I have the approach to try to do one or two things to help the team win. If you try to do too much, you're probably not going to do anything."

Singles by Rivera and Aybar in the second inning were cashed in with two outs when Quinlan stroked a single to left against southpaw Dana Eveland (2-4).

In the fourth, Aybar singled with two out and Matthews smacked a double to left center to bring him home. Quinlan followed with an RBI double to center.

Giving Kendry Morales a day off, Quinlan also dazzled with the glove at first base, making several quality plays behind Kazmir.

After the lefty departed, Matt Palmer worked a pair of scoreless innings, reducing his ERA to 3.93 with three strikeouts and only one baserunner, on a walk.

The big right-hander has given up just one hit in his past seven innings, walking three and striking out five.

Southpaw Joe Saunders, with wins in six straight decisions and seven of eight, makes his final tuneup against right-hander Edgar Gonzalez on Sunday in the season finale.

Izturis ready for ALDS action

Los Angeles (96-65) at Oakland (75-86), 1:05 p.m. PT
By Lyle Spencer / MLB.com

10/03/09 8:00 PM ET

OAKLAND -- Maicer Izturis was recovering from surgery on his left thumb at this time last season, hoping the Angels would go deep in the postseason so he might be available for the World Series.

"I was hoping I'd get back in time," Izturis said. "It healed fast."

That didn't happen, of course, for a laundry list of reasons -- including, in Mike Scioscia's fertile mind, Izturis not being available to multitask against the Red Sox in an American League Division Series that ended in four games. It was another excruciating exit for the Angels.

"He could have been a big X factor," Scioscia said of the versatile infielder with the sure hands and productive bat that comes alive with runners in scoring position. "Izzy would have been very important to what we tried to do.

"Not having him was obviously tough. I think he can do a lot to our lineup -- and we'll see it."

Izturis and Howard Kendrick have been sharing second base in highly productive fashion since Kendrick's return from Triple-A Salt Lake, his batting malaise cured, on July 4.

Blessed with the softest hands on the club, Izturis has made only four errors in 95 combined starts at second and shortstop while setting career highs in runs (75), hits (116), homers (eight) and RBIs (65) over 114 games.

The odd thing about the platoon is that Izturis has punished lefties -- even though he rarely sees them.

Recovering from a knee bruise sustained tripping over Rangers first baseman Andruw Jones on Wednesday, Izturis is batting an even .300 -- including .358 against southpaws in 53 at-bats.

"That's my natural side," Izturis said. "I didn't start switch-hitting until I came into pro ball with Cleveland [in 1998]. I feel the same now from both sides. As long as I get to play, I'm happy."

Kendrick figures to get the Game 1 start of the upcoming ALDS against the Red Sox, who are sending lefty Jon Lester out against John Lackey.

But Izturis' availability -- and ability -- could come into play. In pressure situations, with runners in scoring position, he has a history of elevating his game.

Izturis is a .327 career hitter in 416 at-bats with runners in scoring position. He's at .302 this season in 106 opportunities.

Joe Saunders makes his tuneup for Game 4 in Boston when he faces A's right-hander Edgar Gonzalez in Sunday's season finale.

Pitching matchup LAA: LHP Joe Saunders (15-7, 4.62 ERA) Saunders had a shutout going entering the seventh against the A's on Sunday when it unraveled, with four hits, a

walk and a wild pitch producing three runs. He finished with the win, his sixth in seven starts, yielding three earned runs on seven hits and a walk, striking out three men. Saunders has allowed three or fewer earned runs in his past seven outings, since recovering from shoulder issues. Saunders is 7-3 with a 3.97 ERA in 12 career outings against the Athletics and 3-1, 2.73 in four outings in Oakland.

OAK: RHP Edgar Gonzalez (0-4, 5.51 ERA) Gonzalez was Oakland's scheduled starter for Sunday, but before Saturday's game Geren suggested that he might treat the finale "like a bullpen game." Among those who'd be considered to get the ball first and work the first two innings are lefties Jerry Blevins and Brad Kilby and righty John Meloan.

Tidbits Brian Fuentes' 48 saves are an AL record for a pitcher with a new club, surpassing Joe Borowski's 45 with the Indians in 2007. Randy Myers holds the Major League mark with 53 for the Cubs in '93. ... According to the Elias Sports Bureau, the 2009 Angels, 2007 Tigers and 1930 Cardinals are the only teams in history with 10 or more players that produced at least 50 RBIs. ... Since the start of the 2004 season, the Angels are the Majors' best road team with their 274-211 record. Their 47 road wins this season lead the AL. They won 50 on the road -- and 50 at home -- last year.

Jepsen plans to stop overthinking

Angels reliever blames recent woes on mindset
By Lyle Spencer / MLB.com

10/03/09 4:00 PM ET

OAKLAND -- It was Yogi Berra, or so they say, who made the comment that you can't hit and think at the same time.

It apparently can apply to pitching, too.

Kevin Jepsen has had some struggles lately -- yielding a total of six earned runs on six hits in his past three innings across four outings -- and he thinks he has figured out why.

Instead of just dealing, Jepsen has been "working on some things out there."

That, he added, has to stop -- immediately.

"I'm getting tired of it," he said, having surrendered three hits and a run while getting one out on Friday night in the ninth inning against the Athletics. "This isn't me.

"I'm not the type of pitcher who can work on stuff and be successful. I've got to go out there and be 100 percent. I'm giving up a single, a broken-bat hit, as opposed to going after them and putting them away."

What's strange about it, Jepsen added, is that he feels so strong physically after taking five days off starting on Sept. 20.

"My velocity is fine, I'm throwing strikes, my slider's good, my breaking ball's good," he said. "I'm just lacking a go-after-'em mentality. I've got to get that back, absolutely."

He'll get his chance in the season finale on Sunday, manager Mike Scioscia said.

"Jep's fine," Scioscia said. "His stuff is good."

Since the arrival of July, Jepsen has made 39 appearances, yielding 12 earned runs in 41 2/3 innings (2.59 ERA) with 14 walks and 41 strikeouts.

Scioscia said he's not concerned about a few nicked-up middle infielders with the American League Division Series against Boston looming, given that they'll have plenty of time to rest and recuperate early next week.

Izturis dinged his left knee in a collision with Rangers first baseman Andruw Jones on Wednesday, the same night shortstop Erick Aybar bruised his right hand bunting. Howard Kendrick developed a staph infection in his right knee sliding into home on Sept. 26.

Kendrick and Aybar were in the lineup on Saturday, and Scioscia hopes to get Izturis a few at-bats on Sunday, adding, "Izzy will be fine for the playoffs."

Izturis was recovering from a torn thumb ligament last October and was unavailable for the ALDS, which was won by Boston in four games.

Figgins' historic season

Chone Figgins has had a career year by any and all measures, playing Gold Glove-caliber defense while racking up some historic numbers of his own, like good buddy Bobby Abreu. Combining at least 100 runs scored, 100 walks, 180 hits and 40 steals, Figgins said he was informed he has done something only Ty Cobb accomplished. Figgins came into Saturday's game against the Athletics with 114 runs, 182 hits, 101 walks and 42 steals. Cobb did it in 1915, the only season he accepted at least 100 walks. It was one of the dominant seasons in history: .369 batting average, then-record 96 steals, 144 runs, 208 hits, 115 bases on balls.

Rickey Henderson, the greatest of all leadoff men, never made it to 180 hits in a season. He fell one hit shy in his epic 1980 season when he combined 111 runs scored with 100 steals, 117 walks and 179 hits. Barry Bonds had 181 hits, 126 walks and 129 runs in 1993 but fell 11 steals shy of 40 - not because he wasn't trying. He was caught stealing 12 times. Abreu fell 10 hits shy of achieving the feat in 2001 with the Phillies when he had 118 runs, 106 walks, 36 steals and 170 hits. In 2000, he had 182 hits and 100 walks along with 103 runs, falling short with 28 steals. The remarkable seasons of the Angels' twin catalysts come into sharper focus every day. This is a tandem at the top of the order matched by few in history in terms of getting on base and moving around those bases. Abreu on Friday night became the fifth player in history with at least 30 steals and at least 100 RBIs in a season, joining Cobb, Honus Wagner, Hugh Duffy and Barry Bonds.

Unprecedented feat by Scioscia

Extensive research by Angels broadcasters Terry Smith and Jose Mota has uncovered this gem: Mike Scioscia is the first manager in history to send teams to postseason play six times in his first 10 years.

Even more remarkable, Scioscia has now done it six times in eight years, starting with the 2002 run to the World Series championship in his third year at the helm. He also delivered playoff teams in 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008 and this season.

Scioscia also won two World Series as a catcher with the Dodgers, in 1981 and 1988.

From the Los Angeles Times Blogs

Minor knee injury sidelines Maicer Izturis; Kendrick, Aybar return to lineup

October 3, 2009 | 12:34 pm

Utility infielder Maicer Izturis will be sidelined for a second straight game today because of an injury he suffered when he tripped over Texas first baseman Andruw Jones on Thursday in Anaheim.

Izturis, who starts at second base against right-handed pitchers, hurt the outside of his left knee, but Manager Mike Scioscia said the injury won't impact Izturis' playoff availability.

Shortstop Erick Aybar is in today's lineup against the Oakland Athletics after missing two games because of a bruised right hand, suffered when he was hit by a pitch while bunting Wednesday against Texas.

Ironically, Boston shortstop Alex Gonzalez suffered an injury to his right wrist when he was hit by a Kerry Wood pitch Friday night. Initial X-rays were inconclusive, but the Red Sox are worried that Gonzalez might have suffered a hairline fracture.

Gonzalez told Boston writers he felt good enough to play today. Acquired in an August trade from Cincinnati, Gonzalez has solidified Boston's defense, making just one error in 42 games.

Angels second baseman Howie Kendrick is also back in today's lineup after missing three games because of a staph-like infection on his right knee.