

A's News Clips, Monday, April 26, 2010

Eric Chavez turns back clock in A's 11-0 win

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

It was almost like old times for Eric Chavez at the plate Sunday. But after his most productive day in nearly two years, he wasn't prepared to say he's ready to go on a tear.

Hitting in the cleanup spot, Chavez doubled and singled in his first two at-bats and drove home the A's first three runs in an 11-0 home romp over the Cleveland Indians. It was the first time Chavez has had three RBIs in a game since June 3, 2008.

"There have been really good days and really bad days," he said. "Today was one of those days where I was seeing the ball pretty good. I feel like I've been seeing the ball really good the whole year but I've been missing so many pitches. Today, I felt like I was able to hit the ones that I wanted to."

Chavez was 0 for 17 with runners in scoring position until Sunday, so his production appeared to have the earmarks of a breakthrough. But he cautioned not to make too much of one good afternoon.

"I've never been one to believe that one game does anything for you," he said. "I'm looking for steady at-bats. Games like this are good, yeah. But does it mean I'm going to go on a hot streak for the next month? I don't know about that."

Part of Chavez's reticence are the long and tedious physical therapy treatments he must receive on his back before and after games to just to get out on the field consistently. After playing in just 31 games in 2008 and 2009, he's optimistic but guarded about what the immediate future holds. He's just taking it day by day.

"It's a long process," he said. "It'd be nice to just come here, put on my uniform and play. But it's worth it to get out there and be on the field. But since spring started, I haven't missed one day of going out when I'm supposed to be out there."

Chavez has appeared in 16 of the A's 20 games so far, all but one as the designated hitter. He thinks he could play in the field if the A's need him, but hopes he gets a couple of days notice on it since he hasn't thrown much since the start of the season.

He added that he's getting a lot more comfortable in the DH role, and feels significantly more confident that he'll contribute more as the season progresses.

"It's going to continue to get better," he said. "I already knew early on it would be up-and-down for me. But as long as I continue to climb the hill slowly, I'm happy."

"I'm really not looking for a huge spike in production. Seeing pitches, making the pitcher work, giving good at-bats, I think I'm more concerned about that than my numbers right now."

Chavez just one of several keynote performers as the A's concluded a 6-4 homestand. Starting pitcher Gio Gonzalez (2-1) had his best outing of the year so far, limiting the Indians to five hits and two walks over seven scoreless innings and striking out three.

Gonzalez had just one tenuous moment in the fourth inning, when Cleveland's Russell Branyan doubled off the left-field wall with one on to put runners at second and third with one out.

At that point, catcher Jake Fox came out and gave him a stern lecture about regaining his focus.

"I had to come out and yell at him," Fox said. "I said, 'Look, you're not out of this yet. You've got a base open, you've still got a chance to get out of this unscathed, let's get your mind right and get after it.' And he did."

Gonzalez appreciated Fox speaking up so forcefully.

"He kind of got on me a little bit, which was awesome," he said. "He did his job and gave me the confidence I needed. When you've got a lead like that, you don't want to nitpick in the strike zone. You want to attack."

The A's were attacking all day at the plate. They pounded Indians starter Justin Masterson (0-3) for seven runs in the first four-plus innings.

Eric Patterson had a fourth-inning homer, and Kevin Kouzmanoff chased Masterson with a three-run double in the fifth.

Barton fractures finger, questionable for Tuesday

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

Barton fractures finger, questionable for Tuesday

The A's were three innings away from getting through Sunday without another significant injury, but alas, they couldn't go the distance.

First baseman Daric Barton suffered a small fracture in his right middle finger when he tumbled into the Cleveland Indians' dugout after catching Matt LaPorta's foul popup to lead off the seventh inning.

Barton, who had three hits in the A's 11-0 romp, was removed from the game after the inning and left the Oakland Coliseum for X-rays immediately after the game. It was revealed that he has a small fracture of the volver plate.

It remains to be seen if the injury will keep him out of the lineup. Trainer Steve Sayles said the A's would evaluate what Barton can do before making a decision on his availability for the A's six-game road trip beginning Tuesday in Tampa.

The news was a bit better on other injury fronts. Third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff, who missed Saturday's game after fouling a ball off his foot, was back in the lineup Sunday. Catcher Kurt Suzuki, meanwhile, probably could have played, but the A's elected to give him another day off even though his tight left side was markedly improved.

"I woke up today and it felt 50 times better than it did yesterday," Suzuki said.

"A lot of the tightness has gone away. I hope to be back Tuesday (against Tampa Bay). I don't want to get everybody's hopes up, but I'm pretty optimistic."

With today a travel day, the Suzuki will had have three consecutive days off heading into the six-game road trip to Tampa and Toronto.

As for starter Brett Anderson — who left Saturday's game with tightness in his left elbow area — the A's won't get a real read until he throws again on the side, and that won't happen until Tuesday in Tampa. Manager Bob Geren doesn't believe it's a potentially threatening injury.

"It's more muscular," Geren said.

Michael Wuertz, on the disabled list since season's outset with shoulder tendinitis, had his best rehab outing yet on Saturday with Class A Stockton. He pitched two innings, allowed one hit and struck out two and tossed 21 strikes in 26 pitches in his fourth minor-league outing. But Geren said the right-handed setup man would not be joining Oakland on this trip, at least at the start of it.

"He still needs more time," Geren said.

Ex-A's player finds field of dreams

By Rick Hurd, Contra Costa Times

Time was, Mike Neu was living the dream.

He practiced his craft in some of the most exquisite settings ever created for it, and thousands came to watch. He traveled via a chartered jet, and the accommodations were five-star. The paycheck, modest as it was for his profession, would make most sets of eyes jump out of their sockets.

Today?

The travel comes via slow-moving buses. The accommodations, when needed, often are endorsed by Tom Bodett. The paycheck is considerably smaller. And on a lazy Tuesday afternoon recently, only about four dozen patrons deemed the proceedings worth their time.

So why is this man still smiling?

"I love doing this. I really do," says Neu, the head baseball coach at Diablo Valley College. "I consider myself extremely fortunate, not only to have experienced some of the things I have but to be where I am right now. I go to work happy each day."

To do anything else just wouldn't seem to make sense for the former Oakland A's relief pitcher. Neu spent the 2003 season on an A's team that won the American League West, pitching in 32 games and posting a 3.64 ERA. He seems to understand that he got far more from his 5-foot-10, 190-pound frame — "dripping wet," he jokes — and modest tools than he had a right to expect.

So while a nondescript baseball diamond in a secluded part of a community college campus indeed may be a long way from the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum, Neu's life between the lines is just as enjoyable. In some respects, perhaps even more so.

Neu, 32, no longer is tied to the endless, exhaustive travel that comes with pro ball and thus is afforded more time with his wife, Nicole, and 3-year-old son, Damon. Also important to Neu is a dynamic that affords him the opportunity to teach.

"These kids, they're like little puppies out there trying to figure out what they want to be and where they want to go in life," Neu says. "Seeing these guys move on and get better and have some success, that's what really does it for me now. It's about watching the maturation process and seeing young men become adults, and baseball is a great sport in that regard because there are so many lessons there."

Chief among them, at least one of Neu's players acknowledges, is that the team-as-family concept is not to be treated as an outdated cliché.

"He commands respect," says catcher Kevin Stanley, a Las Lomas graduate who is sitting out this season with an injury but who still is a presence in some capacity at each home game. "When he explains something, it's not just words. He has a built-in credibility because of where he's been. And what he talks to us about doesn't always just go to baseball."

Such a dynamic created a memorable 2009 campaign, Neu's first as the head coach after two previous seasons as an assistant. The Vikings won the Big 8 Conference title and advanced to the state's Final Four, and Neu was named the conference Coach of the Year.

"He comes with high expectations," Vikings pitcher Kevin Harr says. "He knows how we should be capable of performing. He can spot things that you learn at those highest levels that he can use them to make our games better. It's definitely a good place to be if you're trying to further your career."

It's not the first time he's had success at this level. Neu, who graduated from Vintage High-Napa, used two stellar seasons at Sacramento City College to earn a baseball scholarship to the NCAA Division I power Miami, where he helped the Hurricanes to a national title in 1999. That year, he was drafted in the 29th round by the Cincinnati Reds.

Neu's fastball rarely broke 90 mph, but he succeeded with an effective change-up. In 2002, the A's selected him in the Rule 5 draft, and by rule, kept him in the majors the entire season, where he totaled 42 innings, often in blowouts. The A's traded him to the Florida Marlins two days before Christmas in 2003, and Neu appeared in only one more major league game. A shoulder injury suffered in 2005 while with Triple-A Las Vegas of the Los Angeles Dodgers' organization ended his career.

Neu had surgery to repair the damage (a torn rotator cuff and labrum) and while he recovered, he did many of his workouts at the Diablo Valley College gym. The contacts he had on campus and the proximity of the school to his home made the decision to transition careers a no-brainer, he said.

Still, there's something about reaching the top of the mountain and having to descend almost immediately.

"The good part of it was that I got to play at the highest level you can. And it was a playoff team with great players. But my chances were very limited, and that was the bad part of it," Neu says. "But overall, it was a great experience, because being around all the different guys and learning all the things you do — even just being in the environment — gives you life lessons and baseball lessons that you're not going to get anywhere else."

Lessons that best seem to be summed up this way: When you're a baseball lifer, where you suit up is not nearly as important to the dream as what you do with the opportunity.

MIKE NEU

age: 32

RESIDENCE: Martinez

FAMILY: Wife, Nicole; Son, Damon, 3

OCCUPATION: Head baseball coach, Diablo Valley College

QUOTE: "I had to work harder and do more things in order to succeed because of my (lack of size). That helps me now, because I'm dealing with a lot of players who have OK talent but can really go somewhere if they put the time and the work in. Seeing some guys move on and have success and to see other guys really improve, there's a real happiness to that."

San Jose pushing ahead to buy land for A's stadium deal, but costs are climbing

By Tracy Seipel tseipel@mercurynews.com

San Jose officials say the cost to taxpayers for a proposed Major League Baseball park would be small compared to what other cities have offered for stadiums — probably a bargain-basement lease for the Oakland A's on city land near the downtown train station.

Yet assembling the complicated puzzle of land for the ballpark and related road improvements is sure to cost more than the \$70 million estimated by officials who tout the project as a major boost to downtown.

San Jose's challenge in many ways is much steeper than that of Santa Clara, which is working to bring the San Francisco 49ers to town. The property eyed for that stadium is a vacant, city-owned lot right off Highway 101. Having to cobble together multiple parcels is forcing San Jose to pay millions to property owners who may see a bonanza in a down market — then spend millions more to improve access.

Even after shelling out more than \$24 million, San Jose owns less than half the 14 acres earmarked for an A's stadium — and it's not clear all the holdout want to sell. Redevelopment officials will ask the city council on Tuesday to approve another piece of the puzzle: a \$4.6 million cluster of nearby lots that would provide a thoroughfare to the ballpark site from Interstate 880.

Still to come is a third portion of land that agency officials need to complete the thoroughfare — and which they concede they don't have the money yet to buy.

With San Jose facing a \$116 million deficit and hundreds of layoffs, some taxpayers say this isn't the time to spend tens of millions on a ballpark — even one that city officials insist will pump far more money into the local economy. Officials also stress that redevelopment money can't be used to pay cops or staff libraries. And federal grants could pay for some of the road improvements.

QUOTE TK FROM A GUY WHO LIKES THE BALLPARK IDEA

But standing in the way are homes, mom-and-pop business and a gas supply company that sits roughly where third base is envisioned.

"The city's just thinking about themselves," said Juan Figueroa, a 32-year-old salesman at industrial gas supply firm Aeris. He's holding out hope he and his co-workers won't have to relocate.

San Jose officials counter that they've stashed away enough money for just such a one-time opportunity, and time is of the essence.

In the next few months, a high-level Major League Baseball committee is expected to recommend whether A's owner Lew Wolff should be allowed to move the team to the South Bay. Meanwhile, the San Francisco Giants are trying to protect their territorial rights to Santa Clara County, which baseball officials granted in 1992.

Should San Jose get the nod, voters would have to approve any public subsidy, including a discounted lease. No city money would go into building or operating the \$461 million stadium, which would be paid for by the As.

Yet even if a ballpark never materializes, the redevelopment agency plans to continue buying up the 14 acres and build a mix of offices, housing and retail at the site. The same is true of the purchase the council will be asked to approve Tuesday for the so-called Autumn Street Extension, which would bring motorists more quickly into downtown from 880.

Currently, to get to HP Pavilion near the baseball site, drivers have to take Coleman Avenue into downtown, then crawl along Santa Clara Street or follow tight turns through narrow side streets.

"In order to build out the downtown, you need access north to Coleman and 880," said John Weis, the redevelopment agency's assistant executive director.

But while the agency is buying land for phase 1 of the extension, it has no immediate plans to buy a handful of homes or a book wholesaler that sit in the path of phase 2. That would leave motorists with some of the same hairpin turns before reaching the ballpark site — at least until the agency has money to move ahead.

If the council approves the purchase Tuesday, the RDA will have spent most of the \$7 million it's set aside to acquire land for phase 1. Another \$4 million has been budgeted to construct the thoroughfare itself.

None of that is part of the \$35 million the agency has budgeted through mid-2015 to buy land near the train station. Twenty million of that will come from the recent sale of two downtown parking lots; the rest will either pay for land or demolish buildings and relocate utilities. Agency officials also saved tens of millions by deciding last fall to reconfigure the ballpark site rather than buy a large chunk of land owned by PG&E.

Potentially complicating matters is the fact that some of those owners — from telecom giant AT&T to a few homeowners to the 72-year-old book wholesaler at the corner of North Autumn Street — may not want to sell. That could lead agency officials to invoke eminent domain, a lengthy and potentially costly legal process by which public agencies can seize private land. San Jose routinely used the strategy between the 1970s and 1990s to redevelop downtown, but agency officials haven't used it for most of the past decade.

Pressed on whether the RDA might try to seize any ballpark land from owners who dig in, Weis ducked. "We are going to negotiate the property acquisitions," he insisted.

Privately, two real estate brokers say the agency has paid generously for some of its recent acquisitions for the Autumn Street project.

But Mike Akatiff, the 64-year-old businessman who's selling part of his land Tuesday to the agency, says he's confident he could have ended up with even more money if he'd forced the city into litigation. Aside from the \$4.6 million, he's getting an option to buy a nearby parcel of city land on which he plans to build warehouses.

"I looked at the whole picture," he said last week. "This is a good deal."

Chavez ignites 11-run outburst

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

It was Turn Back The Clock Day at the Coliseum, but only Eric Chavez knew about it.

Chavez, an AWOL third baseman in recent years, has re-emerged as a healthy designated hitter and Sunday channeled the back-in-the-day Chavy - albeit without a glove - to spirit the A's to an 11-0 rout of the Indians.

He not only collected two hits and three RBIs, but ran the bases as if all those surgeries and months on the disabled list never happened. He was so 22-ish on this day that he nearly bypassed swift Ryan Sweeney on the basepaths while scoring from first base in the fifth inning.

"I could hear him right behind me," Sweeney said. "Once we crossed home plate, we both laughed. I told him, 'Dude, I thought you were going to run me over right there.' It's good to see him out there. I'm glad he's healthy and looking good."

Chavez doubled home two runs in the first inning and singled home another in the third, giving the A's a 3-0 edge that they nearly quadrupled, thanks to 15 hits - at least one for everyone in the starting lineup. Gio Gonzalez and two relievers combined for Oakland's third shutout of the season and second of the series.

By Chavez's third plate appearance, Cleveland pitcher Justin Masterson had become wary of him. Chavez walked to load the bases, and Kevin Kouzmanoff followed with a double to right-center to clear them. While Chavez read the ball perfectly and ran on contact, Sweeney hesitated to make sure it would drop.

As a result, both scored within a few feet of each other.

Will we start seeing the Chavez of yesteryear?

"There's been really good days and really bad days," said Chavez, who doubled his season RBI total to six. "I've felt like I've been seeing the ball really good the whole year, but I've been missing so many pitches. Today, I felt I was able to hit the ones I wanted to. Does it mean I'm going to go on a hot streak the next month? I don't know anything about that."

For the first time since June 20, 2008, Chavez got a hit with runners in scoring position. He played just eight games last year, 23 in 2008. Now he's the DH against right-handed pitchers and digging it. Why not? Limited throwing keeps him in one piece following back and shoulder surgeries.

First baseman Daric Barton sustained a small fracture in the middle finger of his right hand while pursuing a foul popup in the seventh and exited after the half-inning. The A's are uncertain about his availability for Tuesday.

Would Chavez be moved to first? That's questionable. He doesn't throw much anymore. He said the last time he threw was the last time he played first base, eight days ago. In the final two innings Sunday, Adam Rosales played first.

Eric Patterson homered and hit a two-run triple. Gonzalez followed a loss to the Yankees (five runs, five walks, 4 1/3 innings) with seven scoreless innings, surrendering five hits and issuing just two walks.

Finger could sideline Barton for road trip

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Daric Barton is the A's top hitter (.328) and ranks among the league leaders in walks (19) and on-base percentage (.488). But a mishap in the seventh inning Sunday might shelve the first baseman.

Barton sustained a small fracture in the middle finger of his right hand, according to X-rays, and A's head athletic trainer **Steve Sayles** said the team would consider Barton's limitations before determining his availability for the six-day trip beginning Tuesday against the Rays in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Barton sustained the fracture on the volar plate in the finger while sliding into the Indians' dugout in pursuit of a popup. Of the A's 15 hits, Barton had a team-high three.

Gio & Jake: Winning pitcher **Gio Gonzalez** seemed as thrilled for backup catcher **Jake Fox** as he was for himself.

"The best thing about today was this was Jake Fox's first shutout," Gonzalez said after tossing seven scoreless innings. "He did a great job behind the dish. All the credit in the world goes to that guy."

Perhaps Gonzalez appreciated Fox's actions in the fourth inning. With two outs and runners at second and third, Gonzalez walked **Luis Valbuena** and was steaming. Fox ran to the mound and said a few words, and Gonzalez easily retired **Lou Marson** to end the inning.

"He walked a guy, and I had to come out and yell at him," Fox said. "Sometimes you have to get after them a little bit. Sometimes Gio can be his own worst enemy because he's so competitive. He expects so much of himself. Give credit to him. He was able to bear down."

Briefly: Catcher **Kurt Suzuki** missed two games with discomfort in his left side but said he should play Tuesday. ... **Brett Anderson**, who felt elbow tightness in Saturday's start, said he will throw a side session Tuesday and expects to start Friday. ... **Michael Wuertz** threw his fourth scoreless outing in the minors, going two innings for Class A Stockton. Manager **Bob Geren** said there's no rush to promote the reliever.

A'S LEADING OFF

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

Climbing the charts: Eric Chavez scored his 726th run, moving past Sal Bando into sole possession of fourth place on the Oakland career list. He's looking up at Reggie Jackson (743), Mark McGwire (773) and Rickey Henderson (1,270). Chavez has 280 doubles, nine behind Henderson, the Oakland leader.

A's offense erupts in series-clinching win

Three Oakland players drive in three; Gonzalez stingy for seven

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's startling lineup brought with it a combined .234 average into Sunday's rubber game against the Indians.

A little more than two hours, and 15 hits, later, that same number had suddenly transformed into .255. Guess that's what happens when each of Oakland's starting nine collects a hit.

Never mind that the injured Kurt Suzuki and Mark Ellis were missing in action. The A's got the job done -- an 11-0 series-clinching victory over Cleveland -- thanks to guys named Jake Fox and Eric Patterson, who combined for four hits and four RBIs on the day.

Oh, and some other guy named Eric Chavez helped out, too.

The A's veteran, who entered the game mired in a 0-for-17 slump with runners in scoring position, drove in three while collecting two run-scoring hits in the designated hitter's spot, as his club pounded a rather battered Indians staff.

Chavez's first-inning double brought home Cliff Pennington and Ryan Sweeney. It was his first hit with runners in scoring position since June 20, 2008. Chavez then added a run-scoring single in the third, before walking two frames later and eventually scoring on a bases-clearing double off the bat of Kevin Kouzmanoff. It was Chavez's sixth run scored of the season -- the 726th of his career -- giving the A's veteran sole possession of fourth place on Oakland's all-time runs list.

Chavez, always one to take things in stride, isn't about to do flips off a trampoline or deem himself the next .400 hitter, though. He's simply stoked to still be healthy, so don't go asking if his Sunday performance means the old Chavez is back.

"I don't know anything about that," Chavez said. "It's just been fun being able to help the team out."

It's safe to say those around him sure appreciate it.

"He's a great role model for this team," said Gio Gonzalez, who threw seven shutout innings. "He's a leader in my eyes and a great teammate. You want to do your best for him."

The A's lefty did just that in what was arguably his best start of the season. Gonzalez's seven innings tied a career high, and he allowed five hits while fanning three and walking just two in a 100-pitch effort.

As always, Gonzalez paid tribute to those around him, who aided in the win, but there was something to be said about his ability to pitch deep into the ballgame.

"It's awesome when you can go seven like that," said Gonzalez, who didn't escape the fifth frame in his previous two starts. "I was able to pound the strike zone and experiment a little bit with some of my other stuff."

"He had really good life on his fastball," manager Bob Geren said. "He's got one of the best breaking balls in the league, and he was able to use his changeup effectively to offset those two pitches."

The southpaw's dominating performance, however, was slightly overshadowed by that of his teammates -- eight of whom scored at least one run in the game.

Kouzmanoff's bases-clearing double in a four-run fifth was followed by a triple from Gabe Gross, who inched toward home plate, thinking about an inside-the-park home run, before deciding otherwise. He stood on third base for less than a minute, though, as Fox quickly brought him in with an RBI base hit off Cleveland reliever Aaron Laffey, who followed a short-lived four-inning performance from starter Justin Masterson.

The A's then jumped on righty Joe Smith in the seventh, when Kouzmanoff walked and advanced to third on a double by Fox, who eventually scored right behind the A's third baseman on a triple by Patterson. Patterson also homered in the game.

"It's fun when everyone contributes and is getting on base," Kouzmanoff said.

Kouzmanoff, who entered the matchup batting .189 over his last 10 games, hasn't exactly changed his approach at the plate. Rather, he simply saw a shift in productivity on Sunday after changing out his contact lenses in the middle of the game.

"He looked like he saw the ball much better after that," a smiling Geren said.

Grins were sprinkled all around the A's clubhouse following the victory, which gave the A's a 6-4 homestand before they head into Tampa Bay and Toronto for six games. Oakland outscored its three visiting opponents 47-33 during that span.

Furthermore, A's starting pitchers have allowed five runs over their last five games and have surrendered three runs or less in 17 of 20 games this year. Overall, they're an impressive 9-3 with a 2.65 ERA.

"Everyone contributed today and throughout this whole homestand," Gonzalez said. "You can't ask for a better Sunday."

Barton breaks finger, will be reevaluated

First baseman injured making catch in seventh inning

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A's first baseman Daric Barton suffered a "very small" fracture of the volar plate in his right middle finger during Sunday's 11-0 win over the Indians, the club announced following the game.

Team trainer Steve Sayles said that the team will follow a wait-and-see process to determine what Barton is capable of doing with the break, before making a decision on his availability.

Barton injured his finger in the seventh inning of Sunday's game, while sliding into the visitor's dugout after making a catch in foul territory. Barton was replaced in the A's lineup by Rajai Davis in the bottom of the seventh, and Adam Rosales took over at first base beginning in the eighth. Barton quickly made his way out of the clubhouse following the game.

It marked a bittersweet day for Barton, who exited with three hits. He's no stranger to bumps and bruises, though. Barton has had his fair share of mild injuries this year yet is still one of just two A's players to start all 19 games.

Barton will receive an extra day of rest because the team has a scheduled off day Monday and will use that time to travel to Tampa Bay, where it begins a two-city, six-game road trip.

Sheets, Davis face off in Tampa

By Spencer Fordin / MLB.com

Out of sight, out of signal: Tampa Bay and Oakland will get together for the opener of a three-game series on Tuesday, leading Rays manager Joe Maddon to test his motivational skills. His club has won 16 of their last 29 games against the A's, but Maddon will readily admit that it's harder to prepare for an opponent that you see only a couple times a season.

"It's just tough playing teams you don't play often," Maddon said. "We're big on prep work, and we play our division so many times [that] when you bring [in] these west-side teams, it's a little more difficult. Regardless of whether they're in transition or not, they pitch well through all of these transitional moments."

And so the Rays, winners of four straight series, will try to keep their momentum going against the leaders of the American League West. Both Oakland and Tampa Bay will have the benefit of a day off on Monday before reconvening for the series opener. Oakland's Ben Sheets will face off against high-octane Wade Davis, presenting a compelling matchup.

Oakland has gotten back-to-back gems from Brett Anderson and Gio Gonzalez, continuing a trend that Maddon noticed: Oakland's starting pitchers have yielded three runs or less in 17 of their first 20 games this season. The A's have the best starting ERA of any big league team, but Maddon knows that's not all they bring to the table.

"Offensively, looking at their numbers right now, their batting averages aren't really high," he said. "I know [Rajai] Davis is a different cat for them right now. I think they've become more base-running proficient and are taking more chances on the bases, as opposed to being the station-to-station team they've been in the past. I know [Ryan] Sweeney's a good player in the middle of the lineup. But I think they're primarily built on their pitching, both starters and relievers. You have to outpitch them to beat them."

A's: Sheets healthy, Barton not

First baseman Daric Barton, one of just two A's who have started every game thus far, will likely be a game-time decision on Tuesday. Barton was diagnosed with a small fracture in the volar plate of his right middle finger on Sunday, and if he's out for any extended period of time, the A's would likely turn to either Eric Chavez or utilityman Adam Rosales at first base.

Sheets, a four-time All-Star, appears to be healthy after missing a season due to surgery on his pitching elbow. The right-hander has completed five innings in all of his starts, and he's gotten through the sixth in three of them. Sheets has held the opposition to three earned runs or fewer in each of his outings, but the A's are 1-3 when he starts.

The veteran has also walked at least three batters in all of his outings, and he ranks third in the league in walks (13). Interestingly, Sheets has made 225 appearances in his career, and all of them have been starts. That's the fourth-highest total in Major League history among players who have never made a relief appearance.

Rays: Davis bounces back

Davis is just getting started, just figuring out what he can do as a big league starter. The 24-year-old struggled in his season debut, allowing four earned runs to the Yankees in a 10-0 loss. But since then, he has been unhittable. Davis has worked 11 innings over his last two starts, and was charged with the grand total of four hits and one earned run in that span.

Now, he must do it again. Davis, who was drafted in the third round of the 2004 First-Year Player Draft, will have to gain a better command of the strike zone to take the next step. So far, through three starts, the right-hander has as many walks

(11) as hits allowed (11). Davis has managed to strike out 13 batters, but he has walked at least three guys in all three of his starts this season.

Worth Noting:

Anderson left Saturday's start with tightness in his left elbow and might have his next start pushed back. Anderson will throw a side session on Tuesday before the A's re-evaluate. ... Tampa Bay finally moved over the .500 mark at home after Sunday's win. ... The Rays have outscored their opponents 28-9 in the eighth inning this season. ... Catcher Dioner Navarro was out of the lineup for the second straight game due to lower right leg soreness. ... Designated hitter Pat Burrell returned after missing the previous two games with a stiff upper back. ... Tampa Bay had four runners caught stealing for the first time in franchise history on Sunday. ... Oakland reliever Michael Wuertz threw two scoreless innings in a rehab outing for Class A Stockton.

A's take cautious approach with Anderson

Left-hander exited last start with forearm tightness

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- One day after halting Brett Anderson's impressive outing against the Indians due to left forearm tightness, manager Bob Geren said the A's lefty won't throw for two days and couldn't confirm whether he'll make his next start.

Anderson was pulled from Saturday's contest having allowed just one run and three hits through six solid innings against Cleveland after experiencing the same type of soreness that flared up during Spring Training last year.

As a precaution, Geren said that the left-hander won't try to throw again until Tuesday, when the club is scheduled to play its first of two games at Tampa Bay.

"It's one of those things where we really won't know much until he throws again," the A's skipper said. "It's not something that affects him when he's doing everyday things, so he'll receive treatment and we'll go from there."

The 22-year-old Anderson, who just last week signed a new contract worth up to \$31 million, is hopeful he'll make his next start Friday in Toronto, but Geren mentioned the club's off-day Monday provides flexibility in the event he can't take the mound.

Suzuki sits for precautionary measures

OAKLAND -- An already wounded A's team is taking precautionary measures with catcher Kurt Suzuki, who sat for the second straight game on Sunday with soreness in his left side.

The A's catcher was scratched from Saturday's lineup against the visiting Indians a little more than half an hour before first pitch was scheduled, but he said on Sunday he "woke up today feeling 50 times better than yesterday."

"I'll take another day," Suzuki said. "I'm available if need be, but, at the same time, it would be pointless if I end up hurting myself more."

The 26-year-old Suzuki, who went 4-for-9 in his previous two games, isn't quite sure how the pain arose, but an extra day of rest -- combined with Monday's travel day -- should have him ready for the club's two-game series-opener in Tampa Bay on Tuesday, he said.

Jake Fox, once again, filled in for Suzuki on Sunday while batting seventh. He entered the series finale against Cleveland batting 5-for-20 with five RBIs over his last eight games after going hitless in his first 11 at-bats.

Crisp on comeback trail from broken pinkie

OAKLAND -- An eager Coco Crisp, who has been playing catch with his right hand while rehabbing a fractured left pinkie finger, is slated to begin full baseball activity in two weeks, A's manager Bob Geren said Sunday.

Placed on the disabled list on April 3, Crisp injured his finger one day prior during Oakland's exhibition game against the Giants, when he was tagged by Juan Uribe while sliding into second base. Shortly after the injury, Crisp was told he would miss three to eight weeks, but that didn't stop him from lifting weights and playing catch in the meantime.

"Other than swinging the bat, the rest of his game is still being worked on," Geren said. "It's just a matter of him feeling comfortable and swinging the bat again."

Crisp, who signed a one-year contract with Oakland on Dec. 23, has yet to make his regular-season debut in green and gold. Upon his return in center field, Rajai Davis is expected to slide into left.

Worth noting

In his fourth rehab start, right-handed pitcher Michael Wuertz (shoulder) tossed two shutout innings of one-hit ball, while walking none and fanning two for Class A Stockton. Wuertz will stay behind while the club goes on a two-city road trip to continue his rehab work. ... Rajai Davis received the day off Sunday with righty Justin Masterson on the mound for Cleveland. ... Second baseman Mark Ellis (strained left hamstring) won't be joining the A's on their trip to Tampa Bay and Toronto this week. ... Reliever Jerry Blevins, sidelined since Wednesday after experiencing a back spasm, threw from a distance of 180 feet Sunday.

"He's much better," A's manager Bob Geren said. "We're optimistic for Tuesday."

Athletics rout Cleveland, 11-0

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Eric Chavez hit a two-run double and also singled in run to help Gio Gonzalez win for the first time in three starts, and the Oakland Athletics pounded the Cleveland Indians 11-0 on Sunday to take the series.

Eric Patterson homered and hit a two-run triple, matching his career high with three RBIs.

Kevin Kouzmanoff returned to the A's lineup and added a three-run double. He sat out Saturday to give him time to heal after fouling a pitch off his foot. Kouzmanoff's fifth-inning hit chased Justin Masterson (0-3).

For Chavez, this was an encouraging sign after several frustrating, injury-filled seasons. The six-time Gold Glove third baseman is now the A's designated hitter batting in the cleanup spot.

Chavez, limited to eight games in his injury-shortened 2009 campaign, drove in three runs for the first time since June 3, 2008, against Detroit. He underwent season-ending back surgery last June and has had five operations since Sept. 5, 2007, including two microdiscectomy surgeries in different spots in his back.

Jake Fox and Adam Rosales each singled in a run as the A's did plenty to support Gonzalez (2-1), who escaped a bases-loaded jam in the fourth but otherwise was hardly challenged. Gonzalez bounced back after he was tagged for five runs and three hits in 4 1-3 innings of a 7-3 loss to the New York Yankees on Tuesday.

Chavez got everything started. He doubled in the first, then added the RBI single in the third.

The 32-year-old Chavez was ready for a fresh start this season.

He ended last year with one hit in his last 22 at-bats. He hit .100 with one RBI. That's after he played in only 23 games in 2008, and 90 in '07.

Chavez picked up his 726th run on Kouzmanoff's double, moving him past Sal Bando and into sole possession of fourth place on Oakland's career list.

The A's earned their third shutout and second of the series after winning 10-0 Friday night. Cleveland, which hasn't won a series in Oakland since July 29-31, 2002, was blanked for the fourth time.

Oakland had lost four of six, but gained some momentum with a nice win before taking off for a six-game trip beginning with two in Tampa Bay starting Tuesday and ending with a four-game series in Toronto.

The A's played without catcher Kurt Suzuki for the second straight game as he deals with tightness in his left side. Suzuki hopes to return Tuesday night against the Rays.

NOTES:

The A's had 15 hits.

Indians closer Kerry Wood threw a bullpen session two days after a one-inning simulated game in which his injured back became sore and he wasn't sharp as he'd hoped. Manager Manny Acta said Wood will throw another bullpen Wednesday at Anaheim and then the pitcher's next step would be determined from there. The plan is for him to do a rehab outing before he returns.

A's LHP Brett Anderson, who left his outing Saturday after the sixth inning because of tightness in his left elbow, might have his next start pushed back. He didn't throw Sunday and will test his arm again Tuesday before a decision is made.

CF Coco Crisp, yet to make his Oakland debut because of a broken left pinkie finger, is set to begin baseball activities in two weeks.

Oakland RHP Michael Wuertz, on the DL with shoulder tendinitis, pitched two scoreless innings in a rehab outing for Class-A Stockton. He threw 21 strikes among his 26 pitches.

Gonzalez and the A's shut the door on Cleveland

By Nick Zambrano, Tri City Voice, 4/25/2010

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Ask any pitcher around and they'll tell you that a little run support is always appreciated. Just a couple of runs here and there helps take the weight off any hurler, well how would 11 suffice?

That's exactly the kind of support Gio Gonzalez got from his lineup, when the A's shut down Justin Masterson and the Cleveland Indians, 11-0 on the Sunday afternoon series finale.

Gonzalez, fresh off his last outing - a 4 1/3 inning, five run, five walk fiasco against the New York Yankees - found himself in a few jams early on in the contest. His first threat came in the third. After getting Luis Valbuena and Lou Marson on back-to-back groundouts, Gonzalez surrendered a single to Asdrubal Cabrera. Cabrera would move to third on a single to center by Grady Sizemore. Gonzalez now faced ultimate adversity with runners on the corners and Shin-Soo Choo stepping to the plate.

Choo has been the Indians' most dominant hitter for the year as he is hitting .300 with four big flies to his name. Gonzalez shook off Cleveland's big bat and got him to ground out to short after working the count in favor at 0-2.

He found himself caught in the yarn again in the fourth, this time with runners at second and third and just one out on the board, Gonzalez got Matt LaPorta to strike out before allowing Valbuena a free pass to first to juice the bases. Gonzalez was able to recover on the following at-bat getting Lou Marson to pop out to end the inning.

"He threw strikes," said Oakland Manager Bob Geren. "He attacks the strike zone and he's tough to beat."

After the jams, Gonzalez found himself in a comfortable spot for the remainder of his outing and even flashed some leather snagging a come-backer off the bat of Jhonny Peralta. He would cruise for seven innings, allowing five hits, two walks and more importantly got his record to 2-1 on the year.

"11 runs is a little for me," Gonzalez jokingly commented. "It's awesome when you can go seven innings like that, especially when not only your defense, but your offense can take a load off your shoulders. You can pound the strike zone, experiment a little bit and have some fun."

The A's got to Masterson early on capitalizing on the right hander's inability to find the zone and place his pitches.

In the first inning, Oakland rattled Masterson with two straight hits from the bats of Cliff Pennington and Daric Barton. Barton would be out at second on a force play by Ryan Sweeney, Sweeney however, would be safe at first as Pennington moved to third. Eric Chavez displayed some old form on the following at-bat when he sliced a double down the right field to make it a 2-0 game in favor of Oakland.

Chavez would attack Masterson again in the bottom half of the third with his single down the right field line to score Pennington - who had reached base by way of a walk - to put the game at 3-0.

The veteran Chavez shut down shop for the day going 2-4 with three RBI's. It was the first time Chavez had collected three RBI's in a game since June of 2008.

"It was a really good game," said Chavez. "It's fun when everybody is participating and we're swinging the bats like that."

Masterson's woes would continue in the fourth when he gave up a solo shot to center to Eric Patterson to make the game, 4-0. It was Patterson's first homer of the season.

Unfortunately before his day was finally done, Masterson would get a heavier dosage of Oakland's hot bats.

Now after back-to-back singles by Barton and Sweeney and a walk from Chavez, Masterson had his back up against the wall against Kevin Kouzmanoff. And on the very first pitch he saw, Kouzmanoff made Masterson pay the price and blasted a double to deep center that cleared the bases. The double off Kouzmanoff's bat also happen to come while Oakland had not collected an out.

Kouzmanoff was one of five Oakland hitters to have two or more base hits, he himself grabbed a 2-4 day with a double and three runs batted in.

With the game now out of hand at 7-0, Cleveland Manager Manny Acta had no choice but to yank his young right hander before things got grimmer.

In the fifth, Gabe Gross got into the hitting groove with the rest of the lineup as he connected for a triple that bounced off the right center field wall. He was brought home on a single by Barton.

Having probably one of the best games of his young career, Barton tagged the Indians' pitching staff for a 3-4 performance with a double as well. To his disdain, Barton would have to leave the game in the seventh inning after injuring a finger on his right hand making a catch that landed him in the Cleveland dugout. The team will not know how bad the injury is until he receives x-rays on it.

Masterson completed only four plus innings for the Indians, relinquishing eight hits, seven earned runs, four walks and one home run. With the loss, he drops his record to 0-3 for the season while his ERA jumps up to 5.68.

While Masterson's day was done, his teammates had to endure much more before the full nine-inning set had ended.

Now in the seventh, Oakland decided to have some more fun, this time at the extent of reliever Joe Smith. Jake Fox facilitated things with his double that put Kouzmanoff and himself in scoring position. Now with runners on base, Patterson stepped to the dish and served Smith with a triple to deep left center to bring the A's lead to double digits.

Patterson would score immediately after on a single by Adam Rosales to bring it to the final score. Patterson was 2-4 with three RBI's as well.

"Well, definitely the confidence is there," Patterson said. "We got some guys on, we got some guys in scoring position and guys did their jobs getting runs in."

The A's saw production from everyone in the lineup, but it was Patterson, Chavez and Kouzmanoff who saw the most out of their at-bats as they had a combined total of nine runs batted in.

The A's will enjoy another day off tomorrow before they hit the road for an east coast swing. On Tuesday, they'll head to Tampa to take on the Rays before ending the week in Toronto with the Blue Jays.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento loses on Vegas grand slam

By Nicholas Lozito / Sacramento River Cats

Brian Dopirak hit a walk-off grand slam as Las Vegas 51s escaped with a 14-11 victory over the visiting Sacramento River Cats on Sunday afternoon at Cashman Field.

Sacramento overcame a 6-0 deficit in the fifth inning when it sent 11 batters to the plate and scored six runs, capped by a Jack Cust two-run home run to right field. It was Cust's first home run for Sacramento, which has now lost seven of eight games.

The River Cats racked up a season high 11 runs and 16 hits, including a 4-for-5 performance from shortstop Michael Affronti. Sacramento followed its six-run fifth with a four-run sixth to take a 10-7 lead.

But no lead was comfortable on a hot Sunday afternoon at Cashman Field, where the scoreboard lights up like an MGM slot machine.

Las Vegas scored two in the sixth one in the seventh to cut Sacramento's lead to one, 11-10. Before River Cats reliever Michael Benacka escaped a bases-loaded jam in the eighth inning, the 51s had scored in every inning.

Benacka couldn't escape the ninth inning, however, loading the bases with a single and two walks before Dopirak hit his third home run of the season down the left-field line.

Jarrett Hoffpauir went 4-for-5 for Las Vegas, missing only a double for the cycle and scoring five runs on the afternoon. His solo home run off Sacramento starter Graham Godfrey (six earned runs in 3.1 innings) set the tone for the back-and-forth game.

Sacramento committed four more errors on the day, bringing its season total to 25 (second most in the Pacific Coast League behind Las Vegas' 27). The River Cats also allowed two more unearned runs, bringing their season total to 23, 10 more than the league's next highest total (Las Vegas, 13).

'Hounds Fall 6-5, Head To The Road

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

While it was a solo home run by San Antonio's Matt Clark in the ninth that won the game (breaking a 5-5 tie), it was Brad Chalk's hustle that tied up the game one inning earlier.

Chalk sent what appeared to be a sharp single to right, but made an aggressive turn and went for a double. Right fielder Jermaine Mitchell was a step slow getting to the ball, then hurried his throw to second base. The ball bounded away, and Chalk would move to third, scoring an unearned (but a game-tying) run on a sacrifice fly.

Chalk's play set the table for Clark's home run, capping a comeback in which the Missions erased a 5-1 deficit for the win.

Archie Gilbert and Matt Sulentic homered for the 'Hounds ... and both were outstanding over last three games of the series. Archie's shot was a 3-run homer and Matt's a solo blast which gave the 'Hounds a 5-1 lead in the fifth.

Also erased along the way was a very solid outing for starter Travis Banwart, who went 5.2 innings, allowing two runs (just one earned).

Equal Opportunity Employer: All four teams in the Texas League South are now 8-8 through 16 games.

The RockHounds now embark on an 8-game road trip, playing four in Corpus Christi and four against the Missions in San Antonio before returning home Tuesday, May 4.

Ports Offense On The Upswing In 7-3 Win

MODESTO, Calif. - After getting just four hits in their series opener with the Modesto Nuts on Thursday Night, and following a brutal 10th inning loss on Saturday night, the Stockton Ports rebounded nicely on Sunday afternoon. In their series finale matinee at John Thurman Field, the Ports pounded out 14 hits-giving them 39 total in the series-en route to a 7-3 win over their Highway 99 rivals. With the win, the Ports earn a series split as they head to San Jose to begin the second leg of their seven-game commuter trip.

The Ports received an early boost from Oakland A's setup man Michael Wuertz who made the start on a rehab assignment. Wuertz tossed two scoreless frames to start for Stockton, retiring six of the seven batters that he faced, allowing one hit while striking out two. Wuertz threw 26 pitches, 21 for strikes.

Modesto starter Juan Nicasio proved equal to the task in the early going and lived up to his billing as a big-time prospect for the Colorado Rockies. Nicasio struck out five of the first seven batters he faced to open his outing through the first two innings.

After Wuertz's two-inning rehab stint, scheduled starter Murphy Smith (2-1) took to the hill for Stockton. Smith battled through a third inning jam where he had runners at the corners, but would surrender a pair of runs in the fourth. After recording two quick outs in the inning, Jimmy Cesario tripled to right-center and scored on an ensuing base hit from Scott Robinson to give the Nuts a 1-0 lead. David Christensen followed with a triple of his own to right, scoring Robinson and putting Modesto on top 2-0.

Stockton would storm right back in the top of the fifth. With Nicasio still on the hill having struck out eight batters through four innings, Petey Paramore led off the fifth with a single to center, followed by a Tyler Ladendorf single to right. Kala Ka'aihue came up next and doubled to left-center, scoring both baserunners and knotting the game at two.

Nicasio would pitch through the fifth and receive a no-decision, allowing two runs on five hits while striking out a season-high 10.

The Ports would take the lead for good in the sixth facing Nuts reliever Chris Malone (0-2). With one out, Jeremy Barfield singled to left and Mike Spina followed with an infield single to third. On the play, Nuts third baseman Ryan Piesel threw wide of first allowing Barfield to go to third and putting runners at the corners. Paramore came up next and hit into a fielder's choice at first, scoring Barfield and putting Stockton ahead to stay 3-2.

The run in the sixth would be the lone run Malone would surrender in his 1.2 innings of work, but because Modesto never came back to tie the score Malone would be charged with the loss.

Meanwhile, Smith settled nicely into a groove after allowing two runs in the fourth. After allowing the RBI triple to Christensen in the fourth, Smith retired eight of his last 11 batters to finish his night.

In the bottom of the seventh trailing 3-2, the Nuts got a leadoff single from Beau Seabury to start the frame and then Smith struck out Tim Wheeler as Seabury stole second. Smith would be lifted for Jose Pina, who struck out pinch-hitter Brian Rike and got Jordan Pacheco to fly to right to end the threat.

Smith would go on to earn the win, going 4.1 innings and allowing two runs on seven hits while striking out six.

Stockton's offense rewarded the solid pitching with two runs in the eighth. With Nuts reliever Rex Brothers on the hill, and runners at second and third, Shane Keough grounded to second to bring in Ladendorf with Stockton's fourth run. Grant Green followed with an RBI single to right that scored Ka'aihue and made it a 5-2 ballgame. Those were the only two runs allowed by Brothers in his 1.1 innings of work.

The Nuts got a run back in the last of the eighth. Ben Paulsen drew a walk to start the inning and scored two batters later on an RBI double from Cesario who went 4-for-4 on the afternoon. After Pina walked Robinson to put runners at first and second, Daniel Sattler (SV, 2) was summoned from the bullpen and induced an inning-ending 6-4-3 double play.

In the top of the ninth, the Ports would plate two additional insurance runs off Nuts starter Jonathan Aristil. After a leadoff walk drawn by Barfield, the Ports got an RBI double from Spina to make it 6-3. Later in the inning with two down it was Ryan Ortiz coming through with an RBI knock to right to score Spina, making it a 7-3 ballgame.

Sattler came on to pitch the bottom of the ninth and after allowing a leadoff single to Seabury, retired the next three batters in a row to close out the game, recording back-to-back strikeouts of Rike and Pacheco to seal the Stockton victory.

After splitting their weekend series with the Nuts, the Ports will travel to San Jose for a three-game set with the San Jose Giants beginning on Monday. Right-hander Kenny Smalley (0-1, 5.52 ERA) will be on the mound for Stockton, opposed by San Jose southpaw Aaron King (1-0, 5.19 ERA). First pitch is set for 7 p.m. PDT from San Jose Municipal Stadium.

Cougars Take Finale, Series in Clinton

CLINTON, Iowa - Dan Straily pitched five solid innings, and Leonardo Gil and Max Stassi belted back-to-back homers Sunday afternoon as the Kane County Cougars beat the Clinton LumberKings, 6-3, at Alliant Energy Field. With the victory the Cougars claimed two out of three to win the series and conclude their six-game road trip.

Kent Walton and Gil each smashed an RBI double in the top of the first off Tyler Blandford (0-2) for a quick 2-0 lead. After the LumberKings scored a run in the third off Straily, Gil and Stassi connected for consecutive solo shots in the fifth to make it 5-1. Straily (2-0) left after five frames, allowing one run on two hits, walking three and fanning a season-high eight in the win. Ryan Quigley allowed two runs in the bottom of the sixth, but the Cougars responded with a pair in the seventh on Anthony Aliotti's two-run single. Then Jose Guzman worked the seventh for his second save.

The two teams had been suspended by rain after three innings Saturday night, forcing them to resume that game Sunday before the originally-scheduled contest. Clinton won it, 3-1, as A.J. Huttenlocker (1-1) suffered the loss after he gave up two

runs in the bottom of the eighth.

The Cougars (8-10) are off Monday and start a three-game series at Elfstrom Stadium on Tuesday night at 6 CT against the Quad Cities River Bandits (14-4).