

Oakland A's sweep Baltimore Orioles in 6-4 win

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

Dust off all those empty seats. The New York Yankees are coming to Oakland with the A's playing their best baseball of the year.

The A's not only rallied from a three-run deficit Sunday to complete a three-game sweep of the Baltimore Orioles, but they also posted their fourth consecutive double-digit hit attack in a 6-4 victory and also celebrated the return of All-Star closer Andrew Bailey.

After a humdrum first two months of inconsistency and uncertainty, it's suddenly an interesting time to be an A's fan. They have won four in a row and five of six and sit in a tightly bunched A.L. West, where the four teams are separated by 11/2 games.

As a cherry on top to the team's recent run, manager Bob Geren even handed the ball to Brian Fuentes for the ninth inning, and Fuentes nailed down his 11th save in Oakland's latest impressive win. It completed the A's first three-game sweep of the season.

Goodness, what better time to have the Yankees in, with so many good vibes permeating the A's clubhouse?

"I hope I'm not nervous," said Josh Willingham with a smirk of mock anticipation. "Seriously, we feel like we're playing good baseball right now, and whoever we play, they're going to have to come in here and beat us."

Without Willingham's two-out, three-run home run in the fifth inning, the mood would be a lot less giddy heading into the Yankees series. In a terrific seven-pitch battle with Orioles starter Zach Britton, Willingham got a changeup out over the plate on a 3-2 count and mashed it down the line into the left-field seats. It was his team-leading ninth homer, and like most he has launched, it was a no-doubter.

"When he hits them, you don't even have to look," said Geren. "The sound of the ball off the bat, you just turn around and start high-fiving everybody."

There were plenty of high-fives to go around after this game. Even though he ran into trouble with a four-run top of the fifth, Guillermo Moscoso picked up his second win in two starts with a fairly solid effort. He threw four scoreless innings to start the game and was hurt in the fifth when a throw to third base on a sacrifice bunt attempt resulted in a questionable safe call by umpire Chad Fairchild.

It loaded the bases with none out, and Baltimore pushed four across on a single, a bases-loaded walk and two ground outs. But when Oakland's big inning in the bottom half wiped out the Orioles' brief lead, Geren let the bullpen take it from there, with Craig Breslow, Bailey, Grant Balfour and Fuentes each pitching a scoreless inning.

The highlight of the bullpen parade was Bailey's appearance in the seventh. The A's will try to ease him back into the mix before putting him in his customary closer's spot. But his first appearance since Sept. 17 last season -- he suffered a right forearm strain in spring training -- was a meaningful one.

"I took it as a save opportunity to go out and pitch the seventh inning, and that's what I did," said Bailey, who recorded three ground outs on 14 pitches, nine strikes.

He added that it got him even more pumped up to get a loud cheer as his name was announced.

"It was nice to get in there and feel the love," he said. "I definitely heard it. It was loud."

It will be even louder the next three days with New York in town, and Bailey said the A's are primed for the challenge.

"I'm sure with this series coming up, it's going to be close to sellouts," he said. "So hopefully the fans will be behind us. I'm sure there'll be a lot of Yankee fans, too, but maybe we'll change their minds the way we're playing."

A's report: Andrew Bailey won't be thrust back immediately into closer's role

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

Andrew Bailey is finally back, but it may be a few games before he's solidly back in his closer's role.

Bailey, who had not pitched in a major league game since last Sept. 17, subsequently had elbow surgery then suffered a forearm strain setback in spring training, was activated before Sunday's game. He pitched a scoreless seventh inning Sunday in Oakland's 6-4 victory over Baltimore.

The A's don't want to rush their hard-throwing right-hander into the ninth inning after he's spent so much time out of commission.

"We're obviously pleased that he's back. It makes a good bullpen even better," said manager Bob Geren. "Off the bat, I'll use him in non-save situations. We'll start with one and go from there and find out how he looks, how he feels. When he's ready to assume the closer's job, I'll give it back to him."

Geren didn't say how many outings Bailey might need to be ready for the ninth inning. "We have to get him in there and keep him in sharp," Geren said. "And we also have to get him an inning or two or three, whatever it takes, to get him where he feels 100 percent ready. He has not gone back-to-back, either, and that's something we have to monitor and establish when he can do that."

Bailey is fine with that program. He's been careful all along in his rehab work.

"As far as my role here, whenever the phone rings and my name is called, that's when I'll go out there and pitch," he said. "But I think Bob's going to try to get my feet wet a little bit with some regular game action before we make a decision on the closer's role."

Bailey had four rehab outings at Triple-A Sacramento, but none were in ninth-inning situations. The pitcher said he talked with Geren by phone while the A's were in Anaheim and actually asked for an extra outing in Sacramento on Friday night.

"I expressed that I needed one more just to get over the hump of getting in a game and focusing on command as opposed to how I felt," he said.

The A's made a trade before the game, sending minor league infielder Steve Tolleson to the San Diego Padres for cash considerations. Tolleson, who hit .286 in 25 games with Oakland last season, became expendable when infielder Scott Sizemore was acquired Friday from Detroit.

Chin Music: Activated Bailey won't start out as the closer

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune, 5/29/12: 39pm

In the lineup for Joe Stiglich today ...

It's anticlimactic news, to be sure, that Andrew Bailey was activated today and is available to pitch. Billy Beane told me Friday it would happen if he had a good outing that night, which he did. Of course, Bailey was here Saturday and Bobby Cramer packed up and left, which made it academic.

But the fact that Bailey is finally on the active roster is nonetheless momentous. He's going to make a bullpen that's really hitting its stride that much stronger. Bob Geren has so many options, particularly when his starters can pitch into the seventh, that Bailey won't have to feel pressured to jump right back into the closer role. And the A's don't want him doing that anyway, since he didn't do that in any of his rehab appearances in Sacramento and still hasn't yet pitched on back-to-back days, which a closer realistically needs to be able to do.

"We're obviously pleased that he's back. It makes a good bullpen even better," said Geren. "Off the bat, I'll use him in non-save situations. We'll start with one and go from there and find out how he looks, how he feels. When he's ready to assume the closer's job, I'll give it back to him. He'll pitch in a non-closer role until I'm comfortable with him closing." Geren didn't say how many outings Bailey might need to be ready for the ninth inning. He said he wouldn't necessarily put Bailey in an earlier inning low-pressure situation just to get him comfortable.

"The game dictates it," the manager said. "We have to get him in there and keep him in sharp. And we also have to get him an inning or two or three, whatever it takes, to get him where he feels 100 percent ready. He has not gone back-to-back, either, and that's something we have to monitor and establish when he can do that."

Bailey is fine with that program. He's been careful all along in his rehab work, and said he actually might have been able to come up soon but wanted to make sure he was mentally prepared for pitching in the big leagues as well being physically ready.

"As far as my role here, whenever the phone rings and my name is called, that's when I'll go out there and pitch," he said. "I think Bob's going to try to get my feet wet a little bit with some regular game action before we make a decision on the closer's role. As far as going back to back, it's up in the air right now. I think it's going to be a day-to-day type of thing. Obviously I haven't done that in the minor leagues. But I think for them it was more important for them to have me back and we can go day to day with how I feel."

Bailey said he talked with Geren by phone while the A's were in Anaheim and actually asked for an extra outing in Sacramento Friday night.

"I expressed that I needed one more just to get over the hump of getting in a game and focusing on command as opposed to how I felt," he said. "I'd rather do that in Triple-A than here and not hurt the team. I think after my second or third outing I was ready, but maybe do one more just to make sure the confidence was there and being able to focus on getting outs."

Probably a pretty good chance we'll see Bailey today.

The A's made a minor trade, dealing infielder Steve Tolleson to San Diego for cash considerations. Tolleson hit .286 in 25 games for Oakland last year after hitting .332 in Sacramento. He was hitting .284 for the RiverCats this year and had not played in Oakland.

Here are the lineups. With lefty Zach Britton throwing for Baltimore, Hideki Matsui is on the bench. Josh Willingham's the DH today, with Conor Jackson in LF.

A's: CF Crisp, 1B Barton, LF Jackson, DH Willingham, C Suzuki, RF DeJesus, 2B Ellis, 3B Kouzmanoff, SS Pennington. P Moscoso

Balt: LF Pie, CF Jones, RF Markakis, DH Guerrero, C Wieters, 1B Scott, SS Hardy, 3B Reynolds, 2B Andino. P Britton.

A's beat Orioles for first 3-game sweep this year

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

A week ago today, the A's outlook was dim following a six-game losing streak and some internal strife after reliever Brian Fuentes questioned manager Bob Geren's communication and his bullpen use.

Now, all is sunny again for Oakland, which beat Baltimore 6-4 on Sunday at the Coliseum to complete a three-game sweep, the team's first of the season. The A's have won a season-high four games in a row and five of six overall to get back to the .500 mark, and they're a game and a half behind division-leading Texas.

Best of all, as far as the A's are concerned, 2009 AL Rookie of the Year Andrew Bailey returned from the disabled list, and the two-time All-Star threw a scoreless seventh inning.

"It's great to see Bailey back in there," Oakland first baseman Daric Barton said. "It's weird seeing him in the seventh, but it gives this team that much more confidence. You know he's going to do his job."

Bailey's return will soon clarify the recently muddied closer's role, but manager Bob Geren said that he wanted to get Bailey into some non-save situations initially after Bailey missed the first two months of the season with a right forearm strain.

Geren said after Sunday's outing that it looked like "vintage Andrew Bailey." So could Bailey's 1-2-3 inning perhaps regain him his usual spot immediately? "That's a conversation we will have with him," Geren said, "and make a decision based on that."

There's no doubt that Bailey would like to resume closing now. When asked if he would want to pitch the ninth today against the Yankees, he laughed and said, "Well, yeah, I want to be out there."

Bailey hasn't worked in back-to-back games yet, including during his rehab assignment at Triple-A Sacramento, so it's unlikely he would go two days in a row his first two days back from a long DL stay. Geren said the team will evaluate Bailey's readiness to go back-to-back based on a number of things, including pitch counts and how he bounces back from appearances.

Grant Balfour worked the eighth Sunday and Fuentes the ninth, just as they had the night before, and Fuentes earned his 11th save.

"We have a lot of guys who want to be closer and only one guy (at a time) who can," Bailey said. "Maybe we'll take turns. Until I'm able to pitch every day and put this injury behind me, we'll be juggled for a while."

Bailey's fastball registered 93 to 94 mph on the stadium radar gun, and he threw all of his pitches, using his fastball and cutter in particular in getting three groundouts in a row.

"I've never seen him pitch in person before, so you go on what you hear, but when he's on, he's dominant," said A's left fielder Josh Willingham, whose three-run homer in the fifth gave Oakland the lead for good. "He's going to help us, that's for sure."

The A's are at the .500 mark for the 14th time this season and 47th time since the start of 2010.

Positive signs

5-1 A's record since reliever Brian Fuentes complained publicly about manager Bob Geren.

4 Consecutive games in which the A's have at least 10 hits.

1-2-3 How Andrew Bailey's first inning of 2011 went.

Willingham's HR is another huge 2-out hit for A's

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland's offense is starting to click, and that's especially the case with two outs.

The A's scored 12 two-out runs in a three-game sweep of the Orioles, and on Sunday, the big blow of the game came with two outs and two strikes, when **Josh Willingham** launched a 3-2 pitch from **Zach Britton** into the seats down the left-field line for his team-high ninth home run.

That three-run shot in the fifth put Oakland back up 5-4 after the Orioles had taken the lead in the top of the inning with a four-run rally against A's starter **Guillermo Moscoso**.

"They had all the momentum," Willingham said. "For us to come back and score some runs kind of equalized the momentum. ... You start to play more consistently and win when you get some big hits with two outs."

Conor Jackson also provided a two-out RBI for Oakland in the fifth, and Willingham drove in a run with a single in the first inning. The A's have recorded 10 or more hits in each of the past four games and are hitting .312 in that span.

Moscoso is 2-0 since joining the rotation when **Tyson Ross** was placed on the disabled list with an oblique strain.

Barton's beef: After striking out with two on in the fifth, **Daric Barton** had a testy exchange with a fan near the A's dugout and had to be pulled away.

"Some guy being an idiot," said Barton, who had a hit, a walk and a sacrifice fly Sunday but is batting .211 overall. "I'm tired of our home fans being idiots. Don't come if you're not going to support the team."

Briefly: Oakland recorded seven double plays in the three-game sweep. ... The A's traded minor-league infielder **Steve Tolleson**, who was up several times last season, to the Padres for cash considerations. The A's had acquired infielder **Scott Sizemore** on Friday. ... Sizemore played third base, walked three times and scored a run in his first game with Triple-A Sacramento on Sunday, then walked twice, singled and scored in the second game of the River Cats' doubleheader in Reno.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Holiday and Yankees: The A's expect a crowd of 30,000-plus for today's Memorial Day game against New York. Oakland's only game to draw 30,000 this season was Opening Night, when 36,067 watched the A's play Seattle.

Drumbeat: Andrew Bailey is back, but not quite the A's closer yet - update

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum 5, 29/2011, 11:44am

UPDATE: Bailey pitched the seventh inning and went 1-2-3, with grounders to second and third and first. He was hitting as high as 94 mph on the Coliseum radar gun.

The A's have reinstated Andrew Bailey from the DL, as we expected when we saw Bobby Cramer packing up his locker last night. Bailey, the two-time All-Star closer, is not quite ready to plunge straight into the closer role, and manager Bob Geren said he'll get Bailey into some non-save situations first. I'd think that if Bailey is pretty sharp a time or two, he gets back in the ninth fairly quickly.

"Hopefully, I'll be back in the closer role real soon," Bailey said.

"When he's ready to assume the closer role, I'll give it back to him," Geren said.

It will be a bit longer before Bailey goes back-to-back, which he didn't do at Triple-A Sacramento. There was no real sense in keeping him there for another week or so just to get consecutive appearances, and they'll play it by ear here and evaluate pitch counts, how Bailey's feeling on a given day, etc., before having him go back-to-back.

Here's the lineup behind Guillermo Moscoso, with no Hideki Matsui against lefty Zach Britton: Crisp cf, Barton 1b, Jackson lf, Willingham dh, Suzuki c, DeJesus rf, Ellis 2b, Kouzmanoff 3b, Pennington ss

A's win over Orioles gives Geren plenty to like

By Jane Lee / MLB.com | 5/29/2011 8:45 PM ET

OAKLAND -- A's manager Bob Geren's glass, seemingly always half-full of nothing but positive vibes, is likely overflowing after Sunday's 6-4 victory over the Orioles.

Geren watched his club combine for double-digit hits for a fourth straight game and, in doing so, conclude its first three-game series sweep of the season -- while also reaching the .500 mark for the 14th time this season, to separate the American League West by just 1 1/2 games.

Toss in two-time All-Star Andrew Bailey's perfect one-inning season debut, and it's hard to imagine the momentum being greater any time before now for the A's, who have won five of their last six games following a season-high six-game losing streak.

"It's as good as I can remember this year, for sure," Geren acknowledged after the game. "We obviously enjoy this win for an hour or two, but then we go home and prepare for New York."

Welcoming the Yankees for three games beginning on Monday perhaps couldn't come at a better time for an A's team that's hitting .312 over its last four games -- much of it the result of hitters coming through in two-out situations, where they previously struggled.

"They got the big hits," Baltimore's Mark Reynolds said. "It seemed like they had 20 two-out hits in the series."

Undoubtedly, the biggest two-out hit on Sunday came from Josh Willingham, who was responsible for pushing the A's ahead by launching one from Baltimore's Zach Britton over the left-field wall for a three-run homer that turned a 4-2 deficit into a 5-4 lead in a four-run fifth inning.

"When he hits 'em, you don't even have to look," Geren said. "When he hits 'em, you know."

It marked the outfielder's team-high ninth long ball of the season, and came on the last of a nine-pitch battle with Baltimore's rookie sensation, via a changeup.

"He's a good hitter," Britton said. "I shouldn't let him beat me on my second-best pitch -- especially in that situation. [Catcher] Matt [Wieters] wanted a sinker -- and that's the right pitch at the time -- and I was over-thinking it, wanted to fool him and it didn't work."

"I was just battling," Willingham said. "He was battling, trying to make a pitch and I fouled a couple pitches off, and he left one up out over the plate and I was able to hit it hard."

Willingham went 5-for-11 in the weekend set and tallied four RBIs in Sunday's matinee finale, the first of which came in the first inning via a run-scoring single that plated Daric Barton, who notched the first of 10 Oakland hits on the day with a one-out, line-drive hit to left field.

A's starter Guillermo Moscoso, making his second start for the injured Tyson Ross, cruised through the first four innings on just 40 pitches. The righty stalled in the fifth, though, as the Orioles sent eight men to the plate and placed a four-spot on the board.

However, Oakland's offensive efforts in the bottom of the frame put him back in line for his second straight win, which was made possible thanks to four scoreless innings from the bullpen following Moscoso's departure after five.

Among the contributors was Bailey, who garnered three quick groundball outs in the seventh while making his first appearance since Sept. 17. The A's right-hander, who was activated on Sunday following two months of rehab from a forearm strain, made effective use of his cutter and a fastball that regularly reached 93 and 94 [mph] on the radar gun.

"I felt really good out there," Bailey said. "It was nice to get back and help the team win the ballgame today, and get the butterflies out of the stomach on the first pitch. Going into your first outing of the year, you're just trying to throw strikes. It was nice to get out there and feel healthy on my first pitch and be like, 'OK, it's go time now.'"

Bailey was greeted by a loud reception from more than 15,000 fans in attendance, who were happy to see their All-Star back in action in any inning -- be it the seventh or the ninth, as he gradually eases back into the closer's role.

"It was nice to get out there and feel the love," he said. "It was nice that everyone realized that I was back and pitching. I definitely heard it. We feed off that type of stuff. It definitely pumps you up, and makes you want to go out and compete that much harder."

Said Barton: "It was weird seeing him in the seventh, but I think it gives our team that much more confidence, knowing that he's going to do his job. He feels good and he looked really good."

Confidence is what the A's have been looking for over a consistent stretch this year, and they hope Sunday's victory marked the continuation of what could be a lengthy stay of it.

"We get some good hitting and timely hitting, that's how we gotta win ballgames," Bailey said. "That's what the front office built this team to do -- to compete -- and we're right there. This is a tough division, and we're really close right now.

"The clubhouse is completely different when you're winning, for sure," Willingham said. "It's one of those things where we're playing more consistent baseball, and I think, as a team, that's all you can really ask for, to be consistent in all three phases of the game and play up to our capabilities. And I feel like we have been lately."

Timely hitting helps A's win third in a row

By Tom Green / MLB.com | 5/29/2011 2:45 AM ET

OAKLAND -- The A's have made a name for themselves with their pitching, but it's been their hitting that's done the talking the last three days.

For the third game in a row, the A's notched double-digit hits, as they downed the Orioles, 4-2, to extend their winning streak to three games.

Coco Crisp knocked in the go-ahead run in the sixth inning, when he laced a line-drive single to center to score Cliff Pennington, who had doubled one at-bat earlier and beat the throw home from Baltimore's Adam Jones.

Both Crisp's and Pennington's hits came with two outs in the inning -- a familiar scene in the Overstock.com Coliseum the last two days. After coming through with six two-out knocks on Friday, the A's scattered seven of the timely hits on Saturday night -- including six off Orioles starter Brad Bergesen (1-6, 5.36 ERA), who was chased shortly after Crisp's hit.

Once again, the two-out hits proved to be the difference in the game. Three of the A's four runs were plated with two outs.

"It's been a challenge for a lot of our guys, especially in the counts, too," Orioles manager Buck Showalter said of the two-out hits. "We had a lot of counts in our favor, too. We were a hitter away from having some easy innings, just couldn't get it done."

The first of the A's three well-timed runs came in the second inning, after Mark Ellis reached on a single and advanced to second on a throwing error with two down. That was followed by an RBI single to right by Kevin Kouzmanoff, who returned to the lineup after missing six games with a groin injury. Kouzmanoff finished the night 2-for-4 at the plate.

It was Josh Willingham's turn in the next frame to deliver with two outs. Willingham hit a line drive to center that scored Crisp, who led off with a single and then swiped his 15th base of the season.

"Early on in the year, it just seemed like [two-out hits] didn't happen, and now I think it's just a by-product of guys swinging the bat better," A's manager Bob Geren said.

The A's final run of the night was also due to something that didn't happen earlier in the season -- an Ellis home run. Ellis led off the eighth with his first round tripper of the season to give the A's an insurance run, after which, the second baseman received the silent treatment from his teammates in the dugout.

"His teammates were pretty fired up," Geren said. "It was fun, and guys were jelling and having a good time."

While the A's came up with timely hits for the second night in a row, they also got an up-and-down outing from their starting pitcher for the second straight game. Josh Outman, filling in for the injured Brandon McCarthy, was wildly effective in his second start since Tommy John surgery in 2009. Outman (1-0, 2.08 ERA) earned his first win since undergoing the procedure and tossed six innings of two-run ball in which he walked five batters.

"I definitely pitched myself into some jams," Outman said. "The walks -- I need to cut back on that, and command is obviously a bit of an issue. But I was able to work out of some jams with some double plays and some nice defense. I got to take the positive out of it: I got my first win in a year and a half, so that's a plus."

Outman's biggest jam came in the fourth inning. The southpaw gave up his own pair of two-out singles, as the Orioles tied the game, 2-2, before Robert Andino walked to load the bases for Adam Jones. With the bases juiced and a two-strike count on Jones, Outman pulled out his first breaking ball of the night to fan the Orioles' center fielder and escape further damage.

After the A's secured the lead for Outman, the bullpen clamped down for three scoreless innings to secure the A's fourth win in five games. Grant Balfour -- who a few days earlier had been named the team's closer -- pitched the eighth before Brian Fuentes reclaimed the role in the final frame and found himself in the save column for the first time in nearly three weeks. Fuentes had been tagged for a loss in each of his last four outings before Saturday's scoreless ninth.

"It felt good," Fuentes said. "I'm always surprised when I don't pitch well, so I guess that's a good thing. It was just another day."

A's reinstate Bailey from disabled list

Geren plans to ease right-hander back into closer role

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's received a big boost to their already formidable bullpen on Sunday, regaining two-time All-Star closer Andrew Bailey, who was activated from the disabled list after missing the first two months of the season with a forearm strain.

Bailey took the active roster spot of left-hander Bobby Cramer, who was optioned to Triple-A Sacramento following a two-day stint in Oakland in which he saw no action out of the bullpen.

"It's great to be back," Bailey said on Sunday morning. "It was obviously a long time. But it's a long year, and it was important for me to take the time I did need to make sure I'm back like I am now. I'm looking forward to getting out there, helping the team win and getting the team to where we need to be."

The right-handed Bailey, who did not allow a run in four rehab outings with Sacramento, is expected to be eased back into the closer's role, as manager Bob Geren would like to keep him in non-pressure situations at the start. That could take as few as one outing, though.

"The game dictates it," Geren said. "We have to get him in there and keep him sharp, and get him where he feels 100-percent ready."

Bailey, 26, did not pitch in back-to-back games with Sacramento and, like closing games, will not do so immediately. It will depend on numerous factors, including rest and pitch count.

Still, Bailey's presence following a smooth rehab process that resulted in no setbacks is undeniably welcome. He rejoins an A's team that entered Sunday's series finale with the Orioles riding a three-game winning streak and just one game below the .500 mark in baseball's closest division. He's coming off a 2010 campaign that saw him compile a 1.47 ERA, 25 saves and a 0.96 WHIP in 47 appearances.

"Any time you get an All-Star back in the rotation, it's going to help us out, that's for sure," fellow reliever Brad Ziegler said. "The guys who have been throwing there have done a really good job, so it's not like we haven't survived. At the same time, it's going to be a huge bonus -- especially once he gets back into that role and the niche of being a closer, and being able to go in the ninth inning when the game is on the line. Hopefully, it won't take him too long to get to that point."

Oakland's bullpen has allowed one or more earned runs in seven of the team's past 10 games, but still ranks fourth in the American League with a combined 3.46 ERA and is 12-for-18 in save opportunities this season. Brian Fuentes handled the majority of save situations in Bailey's absence, and Grant Balfour was also used as a closer in a couple of recent games.

"We're obviously very pleased that Andrew's back," Geren said. "It makes a good bullpen even better. We'll see how he looks, how he feels. And when he's ready to assume the closer's job, we'll give it back to him."

"He just adds a lot of depth. He had such a fantastic year last year -- and when he's in midseason shape, he's one of the best in the business."

Colon, Cahill battle in series opener in Oakland

By Alden Gonzalez / MLB.com | 5/29/2011 9:45 PM ET

If ever the young Athletics were going to be ready to host a veteran Yankees team that has dominated them recently, it would seemingly be now.

The Yanks went 9-1 against Oakland last season and have won 20 of their last 23 games. But this A's team is currently playing -- and pitching -- some of its best baseball of the year, beating the Orioles, 6-4, on Sunday to notch its season-high fourth straight victory and move to 5-1 after previously losing six in a row.

Over their last 12 games, the A's Major League-best pitching staff sports a 2.06 ERA. And even though none of the arms that will pitch against the Yankees in this three-game set that begins on Memorial Day are older than 25, age doesn't seem to matter much with this group.

"They're up for it. They've been throwing the ball well all year," A's manager Bob Geren said. "When you're pitching well, you want to go right in against some of the best teams in baseball because your confidence is high and you've been throwing well."

Geren could be confident himself because of this: His closer, Andrew Bailey, was activated for Sunday's game after missing the first two months of the season on the disabled list with a forearm strain.

Oh, and his Game 1 starter, Trevor Cahill, has been one of baseball's best pitchers all season.

The 23-year-old right-hander is 6-2 with a 2.02 ERA that ranks second among American League starters, and has given up more than three earned runs just once in 11 starts this season. But for some reason, he has struggled in his two career starts against the Yankees, giving up 14 runs in 10 innings.

"They're one of the best teams in the big leagues for a long time now," said Cahill, whose first 2011 start against New York will see him match up with savvy vet Bartolo Colon. "There are a lot of veterans on that team, so they know how to hit younger guys. They might have a little bit of an edge on us. But if we just go in there and act like they're just another team, we should be all right -- just don't get intimidated."

Both clubs will meet while sitting 1 1/2 games out of first place in their respective divisions -- with the Yankees in second place in the AL East and the A's tied for third in the AL West.

The Yankees, 8-4 in their last 12 games, dropped their first two against the Mariners at Safeco Field -- including one in extra-inning walk-off fashion on Saturday -- but bounced back on Sunday with a convincing 7-1 victory.

Just in time to enter a place where they went 5-1 last year.

"I think these past couple of games have been really hard on us," said Yankees outfielder Nick Swisher, who homered on Sunday and spent his first four years in the big leagues with the A's. "Definitely not the way we would have liked them, but I think that just goes to show the tenacity of this team, to come back today after a late game on [Saturday] night. You come in here, there's no batting practice early [on the field], everyone's in the cage getting their swings in. That's the mental focus we have."

Yankees: "M&M Boys" Part II?

Well, perhaps not. But Curtis Granderson and Mark Teixeira were mentioned in the same breath as Roger Maris and Mickey Mantle recently.

Heading into Sunday's game, Granderson (16) and Teixeira (15) were the first pair of Yankees teammates to each hit at least 15 homers through the Yankees' first 50 games since -- you guessed it -- that magical 1961 season, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

In a year that saw Maris finish with a record-breaking 61 homers and Mantle with 54, Maris had 17 homers through the Yankees' first 50 games, while Mantle had 15. Granderson and Teixeira rank second and third, respectively, to the Blue Jays' Jose Bautista (20) for the Major League lead in homers.

Athletics: Matsui reunited once again

Hideki Matsui, who spent the first seven years of his professional career in the U.S. suiting up for the Yankees, will face his former team for the first time in an A's uniform.

The 34-year-old designated hitter faced off against the Yankees for the first time when he played for the Angels last year, and went 7-for-32 (a .219 batting average) with three homers and five RBIs in eight games.

Matsui, who had Sunday off, is batting .207 with one homer in 21 May games.

Worth noting

After going 1-for-3 on Sunday, Yankees shortstop Derek Jeter (2,980) is 20 hits away from becoming the 28th member of the 3,000-hit club. ... Indications are that Jorge Posada will sit for the Yankees when there is a left-handed starter opposing them, as manager Joe Girardi prefers to get Derek Jeter and Alex Rodriguez in the DH spot in those instances. ... In order to open a spot for Bailey on the active roster, the A's optioned lefty Bobby Cramer to Triple-A Sacramento on Sunday. ... Oakland traded Minor League infielder Steve Tolleson to the Padres for future considerations.

A's deal infielder Tolleson to Padres

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's traded Minor League infielder Steve Tolleson to the Padres on Sunday for future considerations.

Tolleson, initially claimed by the A's off waivers from Minnesota last year, made his Major League debut for Oakland in April and hit .286 with a home run and four RBIs in 25 games over two stints.

The 27-year-old Tolleson, who can play three infield positions and the outfield, competed for the A's backup infield job in Spring Training but lost out to Andy LaRoche. He was hitting .274 with five home runs and 19 RBIs in 46 games at Triple-A Sacramento this season.

A's complete sweep of Orioles

By ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Home runs are such a rare commodity for the Athletics that manager Bob Geren stood up and started celebrating when Josh Willingham's three-run shot sailed into the left-field stands Sunday.

Willingham's go-ahead homer capped a four-run fifth inning and propelled the A's to a 6-4 win over the Baltimore Orioles, completing Oakland's first three-game sweep this season.

"When he hits them, you don't even have to look," Geren said after Willingham's second homer in his last three games. "The sound of the ball off the bat, you just turn around and start high-fiving everybody."

It's only the fourth three-run shot of the season for Oakland, which has the third-fewest home runs (30) in the majors. Twenty-one of them have been solo drives.

Kevin Kouzmanoff added two hits for Oakland, which extended its longest winning streak this season to four games. The A's also continued their home dominance of the Orioles with their 12th win in 13 tries at the Coliseum.

"The clubhouse is completely different when you're winning," said Willingham, who also drove in Oakland's first run with a single. "We're playing more consistent baseball, and as a team that's all you can ask for is to be consistent in all three phases of the game and play up to your capabilities. I feel like we have been lately."

Oakland got a boost from two-time All-Star closer Andrew Bailey, who made his season debut after being sidelined with a strained right forearm. He pitched a scoreless seventh.

Vladimir Guerrero singled in the eighth to extend his hitting streak to 14 games, but the Orioles couldn't score against four relievers after putting up four in the fifth.

They wound up dropping their third straight on the road after a five-game winning streak at home.

"That one inning we pushed four across. That's pretty hard to quarrel with," Baltimore Buck Showalter said. "But we had some other opportunities. We just didn't get it done."

Guillermo Moscoso (2-0) gave up five hits with two walks to earn his second straight win after being called up from the minors on May 24 to replace injured starter Tyson Ross.

Craig Breslow, Bailey and Grant Balfour each pitched one scoreless inning and Brian Fuentes worked the ninth for his 11th save in 13 tries.

Baltimore led 4-1 after loading the bases against Moscoso in the top of the inning — then scoring four runs with only one hit.

Felix Pie had an RBI single that A's center fielder Coco Crisp appeared to make a diving catch on before the ball popped out of his glove after hitting the ground. Nolan Reimold, pushed into action when center fielder Adam Jones left with a sore shoulder, then drew a bases-loaded walk and Nick Markakis and Guerrero added run-scoring groundouts.

The loss of Jones left the Orioles without their leading run producer.

That's significant for a team that has struggled to score on this road trip. After getting four runs against Moscoso, Baltimore managed only two baserunners over the final four innings.

The A's got a lift from Bailey, who had been on the DL since March 30. The 2009 AL Rookie of the Year retired all three batters he faced as Oakland tries to ease him back into the mix.

"He looked good," Geren said. "I thought his stuff was pretty much normal. From the side it looked like vintage Andrew Bailey, which is a huge plus for us."

Oakland gave Bailey a 6-4 lead to work with after chasing Baltimore starter Zach Britton in the sixth. Daric Barton hit a sacrifice fly to drive in Mark Ellis after the O's intentionally walked Crisp to load the bases.

Britton (5-3) was tagged for career highs of six runs and 10 hits. The left-hander, who was attempting to tie Jake Arrieta for the team lead in wins, walked three and struck out three.

Willingham singled to drive in Barton in the first with the A's first run. In 16 career games against the Orioles, Willingham is batting .400 with four home runs and 12 RBIs.

NOTES: Baltimore sent struggling RHP Brad Bergesen to Triple-A Norfolk and called up LHP Pedro Viola from Double-A Bowie. Bergesen (1-6) took the loss in Saturday's game.

After the game, the team also optioned RHP Chris Tillman to Norfolk but did not announce a corresponding move. ... To make room for Bailey the A's optioned LHP Bobby Cramer to Triple-A Sacramento. Cramer was called up Friday when Oakland traded David Purcey to Detroit but did not pitch against Baltimore.

Gutierrez: Geren looks smarter when A's bullpen does its job

Paul Gutierrez, CSNCalifornia.com

A constant criticism (besides his communication skills, of course) of A's manager Bob Geren throughout his four-plus season tenure has been his handling of the bullpen.

We all know Brian Fuentes blew the lid off both topics in venting last Monday night in Anaheim.

But isn't it interesting how much of a genius Geren suddenly looks when the bullpen is dominant, as it was in this weekend's three-game sweep of the visiting Baltimore Orioles?

That's what happens when guys do their jobs to the nth degree.

Consider: in a combined 11 innings of relief against the Orioles, the A's bullpen allowed three hits. And two of those came Sunday.

Brad Ziegler (two innings in one appearance), Joey Devine (two appearances), Michael Wuertz, Grant Balfour (two appearances), Fuentes (two appearances, two saves), Craig Breslow and Andrew Bailey threw shut-down ball at the Orioles.

And with Bailey activated and making his 2011 debut Sunday, it's only a matter of time before the two-time All-Star re-assumes his role as closer, establishing everyone else's role in the bullpen as well.

With the bullpen rounding into dominant shape, it's no surprise the A's are riding a season-best four-game winning streak in getting back to .500 at 27-27 and within a game-and-a-half of first-place Texas.

The next, and perhaps, biggest challenge, though, arrives Monday. Paging the Bronx Bombers.

Oakland sweeps Baltimore with 6-4 win as Bailey returns to bullpen

Sam McPherson, examiner.com

(OAKLAND) -- They're not quite Murderer's Row, but the Oakland Athletics hitters just had their best series of the 2011 season.

In sweeping the Baltimore Orioles in a three-game series -- while also compiling a nice four-game winning streak to get back to .500 on the year -- the A's offense once again cranked out double-digits in hits today on their way to a 6-4 win over the visiting Birds from Baltimore.

The Orioles are now 4-24 in their last 28 games in Oakland.

But with ten hits again, the A's offense picked up its starting pitcher today in a rare twist of roles. Guillermo Moscoso gave up four runs in the top of the fifth inning, as Oakland fell behind 4-1. But behind a three-run home run from Josh Willingham in the bottom of the inning, the A's retook the lead and closed the Orioles out the last four innings for the win -- including the season debut of Andrew Bailey, who pitched a perfect seventh inning in his return to the majors.

Oakland now has compiled 43 hits in its last four games, and in scoring 20 runs over those four games as well, the A's have put together their first significant winning streak of the season.

And just in time, as they lost six straight last week to fall into last place in the American League West. Strangely, they're still in last place, but at .500 and 1.5 games behind first place, things are looking much brighter than they were last Sunday.

Five runs is a magic number for the A's offense, too, as the team is now 18-2 when scoring five runs or more. When they score four runs or less, Oakland is only 9-25.

How long will this offensive display last? With the New York Yankees coming to town tomorrow for a three-game series, we'll soon find out.

The last four wins have come against Los Angeles (28-27) and Baltimore (24-27), not exactly the dominant teams of the league. The Angels and the Orioles rank second and 12th, respectively, in the 14-team AL coming into today's play, and with most of the damage in this streak coming against Baltimore, it's easy to write off the sweep as coincidental good fortune.

The Yankees are seventh in the league in ERA right now, with a slightly better than average 3.68 team ERA currently. But they're still the flagship franchise in the majors, so the A's will be able to see where they stand in 2011 as they face the Bronx Bombers for the first time this season.

After the Yankees series, Oakland goes on the road for a ten-game trip through Boston, Baltimore and Chicago -- so the next two weeks are really going to decide the A's fate this season.

Hopefully, the offense is getting hot at just the right time.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

First-place Sacramento earns split in Reno

By Veronika Tafoya / Sacramento River Cats

After Sacramento used a four-run sixth inning to top Reno 5-2 in Game 1 of a Sunday doubleheader at Aces Ballpark, the River Cats hoped to keep the fire going in Game 2.

Sacramento would settle for a split, however, as the Reno Aces topped the River Cats 11-3 to take a 2-1 series lead heading into Monday's series finale.

Scott Sizemore had a productive first inning in Game 2. He got his first base hit in a River Cats uniform, then stole second base and scored on a sacrifice fly from Anthony Recker.

After River Cats Manager Darren Bush was ejected in the second inning, Wes Timmons singled home Matt Carson. Shane Peterson scored on an RBI single from Jemile Weeks, increasing the Cats' lead to 3-0.

Although River Cats entered Game 2 with a 19-2 record when scoring first, they struggled to keep their early lead. Reno cut the lead to 3-2 in the second inning with a two-run single by Cody Ransom. However, it wasn't until the fourth inning when they really stamped out Sacramento's spark.

Sacramento reliever Lenny DiNardo immediately gave up a solo home run to the first batter he faced, first baseman Brandon Allen, to tie the game. Unfortunately for DiNardo, his outing didn't get much better. He gave up six runs off four hits, the final hit being a three-run homer by Wily Mo Pena that which brought the Aces' lead to 8-3.

Jerry Blevins hoped to hold the Aces off from scoring any more runs in the sixth inning, but things didn't go as planned. He gave up a solo home run to Cole Gillespie, then another two-run homer to Tony Abreu to give Reno an 11-3 lead.

Despite having nine hits, the River Cats would end the game with five scoreless innings. Eight runners were stranded on base in Game 2, and 20 Cats runners were left on base in both games.

In Game 1 of the doubleheader, River Cats trailed the Aces for most of the game, but pulled ahead in the fourth inning.

Upon taking the mound in the sixth inning, Reno reliever Jason Urquidez gave up back to back hits to Peterson and Weeks, then walked Sizemore to load the bases. The next three Sacramento batters reached base, allowing Peterson, Weeks, and Sizemore to score for a 4-2 lead.

With bases loaded, Adrian Cardenas grounded into a double play that brought in Sogard for the last run of the four-run inning, polishing off the victory for the first game of the day.

River Cats starting pitcher Graham Godfrey took the win, striking out seven over 6.0 innings, and reliever Willie Eyre got his second save of his season. Jai Miller hit a solo home run in the fourth inning.

With the split, the River Cats remain in first place in the Pacific Coast League's Pacific South Division.

The River Cats finalize the four-game series against the Aces in Reno on Monday at 1:05 p.m., with right handers Travis Banwart (1-3, 2.87) of Sacramento and Matt Tora (3-0, 3.67) facing off.

Barfield and Heether Help Hounds To 11-3 Win

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

Citibank Ballpark

Through five innings Sunday afternoon, Northwest Arkansas' Chris Dwyer had not only denied the RockHounds a run ... he had yet to allow a hit. Dwyer, the # 8 prospect in the Kansas City Royals organization would see the shutout, and five innings of no-hit baseball, go by the boards as the 'Hounds erased a 2-0 deficit with a 5-run sixth inning, followed by a 6-run seventh. Dwyer's line went from five, shutout and no-hit innings, to allowing five earned runs in 5.1 innings, and the 'Hounds went on to win, 11-3.

Jeremy Barfield had a pair of "geographical" 2-run hits. With the bases loaded and the score tied at 2-2 in the sixth, Barfield sent a "Pittsburgh chop" over the head of third baseman Mario Lisson, giving the RockHounds the lead for good at 4-2. One inning later, his "Texas Leaguer," again with the bases full, dropped in to bring in two more runs.

By the time the seventh inning was in the books, the 'Hounds had batted around in consecutive innings, scoring 11 runs.

- A "Pittsburgh chop" is a ball hit on a long, high hop, sufficient to extend over the head of the infielder for a base hit.
- The 'Hounds sent just 17 batters to the plate in the first five innings, then batted around in both the sixth and seventh, sending 20 batters to the dish.
- Barfield had two of the four, 2-hit swings of the bat by the RockHounds Sunday afternoon. Adam Heether ripped a game-tying, 2-run double off the wall in left to drive in the team's first two runs of the game, and Kent Walton sent a 2-run single up the middle, just eluding both of the Naturals' middle infielders, in the seventh.
- Fabian Williamson came up from (Advanced-A) Stockton to make a spot start in the absence of Anthony Capra (on the disabled list with a blister on his pitching hand). Williamson, whose ERA at Stockton was 9.24, went 4.1 innings, allowing just two runs (one earned) on five hits and two walks, striking out three.
- Jermaine Mitchell went 1-for-5 with a run scored and has now reached base in 23 consecutive games, hitting exactly .400 in that stretch. The streak matches the longest on-base streak (reaching base via hit, walk or hit by pitch) in the Texas League this season.

There were two games being played after the 'Hounds Sunday contest, but Jermaine entered Sunday's play leading the Texas League in (with his stats updated through Sunday): Batting (.366), slugging percentage (.651), on-base percentage (.489), He leads the Texas League in hits (68), runs (52), walks (44) and triples (13).

He now leads all of Minor League Baseball in triples (Cole Gillespie of the Triple-A Reno Aces has 12) and shares the Minor League lead in runs scored. No other Texas League player has more than four triples.

- With one game remaining in the home stand, the RockHounds and their opponents (Tulsa and NW Arkansas) have combined to score 90 runs in five games, averaging exactly 18 runs-per-game.
- Northwest Arkansas kept its one-game lead in the North, as Frisco defeated Tulsa. While San Antonio has the first half South Division pennant all but clinched, the North is wide open, with all four teams in the hunt.
- The RockHounds host Northwest Arkansas Monday (Memorial Day) at 4 p.m., with a CAF flyover just before the first pitch. The series is a re-match of the last two Texas League Championship Series' (the RockHounds won the 2009 title and the Naturals won the crown last season).

Wheeler K's 12 As Giants Blank Ports 2-0

05/29/2011 8:00 PM ET

SAN JOSE, Calif. - For the third time in their last four meetings, the Stockton Ports couldn't put a run against the San Jose Giants. Giants starter Zack Wheeler (4-2) submitted a career-high 12 strikeouts and a career-long seven scoreless innings as the Giants edged the Ports by a final of 2-0. For San Jose, it was their 10th straight win overall and sixth straight win over Stockton.

The Ports had a chance to score in each of the first two frames. Michael Gilmartin doubled with one out in the first, but Wheeler, in completing a strikeout of the side, got Michael Choice and Mitch LeVier swinging to end the inning. In the 2nd, the Ports got a leadoff single from Myrio Richard. Anthony Aliotti then reached on an error made by shortstop Carter Jurica. With two on and nobody out, Wheeler recorded back-to-back strikeouts of Dusty Coleman and Rashun Dixon, then got Juan Nunez to hit into a fielder's choice to end the inning.

Ports starter Murphy Smith (2-5) fell victim to defensive miscues in the 2nd inning. With one out, Jarrett Parker reached on a fielding error made by Coleman at short. Stockton then guessed correctly on a pitch-out as Parker took off for second with Tommy Joseph at the plate. The throw from Nunez, however, went into center field, a throwing error that allowed Parker to reach third base. Joseph then cashed in for the Giants with a sac-fly to right to give San Jose a 1-0 lead.

Smith had allowed just one hit going into the 6th inning. With one out in the 6th, however, the Giants got back-to-back hits to pad their lead. Ryan Cavan doubled to right and Chris Dominguez followed with a single to center to make it a 2-0 Giants lead.

Despite one of his best efforts of the season, Smith took the tough-luck loss without any run support, going seven strong innings and allowing two runs (one earned) on four hits while striking out three.

Wheeler, meanwhile, was in the midst of his most dominant performance of the season and perhaps his career. The right-hander and top pitching prospect for the Giants went seven scoreless innings, allowing just three hits while striking out a career-high 12 batters.

Stockton had another opportunity to plate a run in the 8th, but fell short on a close play at the plate. Conner Crumbliss started the inning against reliever Jake Dunning with a line shot off the right-field wall. After a leaping effort from Ryan Lollis to make the catch at the wall, the ball bounced off the wall and into the right field lawn. As he hit third base, Crumbliss was waved home by Ports manager Webster Garrison. On a bang-bang play at the plate, Crumbliss was ruled tagged out by Joseph on the relay throw made by Jurica. Two batters later, Choice singled with two down, prompting Andy Skeels to fetch left-hander Ari Ronick (SV, 1) from the bullpen to face LeVier, who struck out swinging to end the inning.

Ronick earned his first save of the season by tossing a perfect ninth, recording a strikeout of Coleman to end the ballgame.

Josh Lansford pitched a scoreless 8th inning for the Ports.

Stockton will try and snap San Jose's 10-game winning streak in a Memorial Day matinee on Monday at Municipal Stadium. Left-hander Jake Brown (0-0, 27.00 ERA) will make his second Cal-League start for the Ports, opposed by Giants right-hander Andy Reichard (2-0, 2.73 ERA). First pitch is set for 2 p.m. PDT.

Sunday's Game POSTPONED

05/29/2011 12:24 PM ET

Due to excessive rain today's game between the Burlington Bees (36-14) and the Quad Cities River Bandits (25-24) is postponed. The game will be played in doubleheader form Monday in two seven inning games at Community Field.

Monday the gates will open at 12 p.m. for a 1 p.m. start time. Fans can enjoy a special Memorial Day game with Dollar Monday. Adult general admission tickets are just \$2 and senior/student general admission tickets, hot dogs, pizza, popcorn, and cans of Pepsi products are just ONE DOLLAR. Enjoy 16 oz. cans of Miller Lite and Coors Light for just \$3.25 sponsored by Miller Lite and Everything That Rocks KQ92.

2011 Bees tickets are on sale now! To purchase season tickets, bonus books or single-game tickets, please give the Bees a call at (319) 754- 5705, go online to www.gobees.com, or stop by the box office at Community Field during normal business hours.