

Gio Gonzalez recovers after shaky start as A's beat Toronto Blue Jays

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Gio Gonzalez made a quick trip to the A's clubhouse during the second inning Saturday and bumped into general manager Billy Beane, who delivered a message.

"I don't want to see you up here again until the eighth or the ninth," Beane told his left-hander.

Gonzalez obliged, delivering his best effort since the All-Star break in the A's 5-1 victory over the Toronto Blue Jays at the O.co Coliseum.

Gonzalez had lost five consecutive starts since posting his last victory on July 17 against the Los Angeles Angels. But a fireworks crowd of 28,434 was treated to the form that made Gonzalez an All-Star.

He surrendered just four hits, struck out nine and walked one over eight innings. With his pitch count at 100, Gonzalez appeared to have enough left to try for his first career complete game.

But with closer Andrew Bailey warmed up, A's manager Bob Melvin didn't send his starter out for the ninth.

That was OK by Gonzalez (10-11), who said he was just happy to give his bullpen a rest. He hadn't pitched as deep as seven innings in any of his previous five starts.

"They want to see me going back out there, instead of looking into the bullpen and thinking 'All right, let them go out there and pitch for you,' " Gonzalez said. "It was more like, 'All right, I got this.' This is where I have to grow up and learn to try to get my own outs."

Gonzalez entered the night 1-5 with a 6.29 ERA in six starts since the break.

He didn't seem long for Saturday's game after a 25-pitch first inning, when he allowed Toronto's only run. Gonzalez issued a walk and hit Adam Lind above the right wrist, sending the Blue Jays' designated hitter to the hospital for X-rays.

But Gonzalez limited the damage, stranding the bases loaded by retiring Brett Lawrie on an inning-ending popup.

"The key at-bats don't necessarily happen late in the game," Melvin said. "They can happen early. It was important he didn't give up more runs in the first."

After his 25-pitch first, Gonzalez needed just 39 pitches to get through the next four innings. He retired 19 of 20 batters through the seventh.

Gonzalez said he drew motivation from his chance encounter with Beane.

"I didn't want to disappoint him."

The A's tied the game in the bottom of the first on Hideki Matsui's opposite-field RBI single to left off Toronto rookie Henderson Alvarez (0-1).

They took the lead for good in the fourth, when David DeJesus bounced into a 4-6-3 double play that scored Brandon Allen for a 2-1 advantage.

The A's stripped away all drama by scoring three in the eighth, including Josh Willingham's pinch-hit, two-run homer off Rommie Lewis.

Willingham has nine homers in his past 21 games, and his team-high 73 RBIs surpass last year's team-leading total of 71 by Kevin Kouzmanoff and Kurt Suzuki.

But the story was Gonzalez, who earned his first win against an American League East team since beating Boston on July 21, 2010.

Oakland A's update: Lineup goes all-lefty for Toronto Blue Jays right-hander

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

A's manager Bob Melvin penciled in an all-lefty batting order Saturday night against Toronto Blue Jays right-hander Henderson Alvarez.

It marked the first time the A's did not start a right-handed hitter since Sept. 24, 1940, against the Boston Red Sox, according to A's historian David Feldman.

Put an asterisk next to that, since the A's had four switch-hitters in the lineup -- second baseman Jemile Weeks, shortstop Cliff Pennington, center fielder Coco Crisp and catcher Landon Powell.

Melvin said he simply saw an opportunity to rest some of his everyday guys and load his lineup with lefties such as Ryan Sweeney and Eric Sogard. Catcher Kurt Suzuki, left fielder Josh Willingham and third baseman Scott Sizemore -- all right-handed batters -- were out of the lineup.

"It was a right-handed pitcher," Melvin said. "Sweeney needs to play, (David) DeJesus had to get back in there."

The A's haven't seen many right-handers lately. Toronto's Luis Perez, who goes Sunday, will mark the ninth lefty starter they have faced in the past 14 games.

Oakland is 21-20 against left-handed starters despite entering Saturday with a .236 batting average against lefties, second-lowest in the American League.

Pitcher Brett Anderson can't wait to shed the bulky arm brace he has worn since having Tommy John surgery on his left elbow July 14.

The bulky contraption helps immobilize the elbow, and Anderson has removed the brace only to do range-of-motion exercises.

Anderson is scheduled to get the brace removed during a doctor's visit Monday. He's expected to be sidelined until at least midway through next season.

What does he plan to do with the brace?

"Set it on fire," Anderson said.

Another high-profile pitcher recovering from Tommy John surgery, right-hander Michael Ynoa, has thrown off the mound at the team's minor league complex but will not pitch in any games this season, assistant general manager David Forst said.

Ynoa is right around the anniversary of his surgery.

Ynoa, who turns 20 next month, has pitched in just three games for the A's rookie league team since he was signed out of the Dominican Republic for a \$4.25 million bonus in 2008.

Sonny Gray, the A's top draft pick in June, has not allowed a run through two starts with Double-A Midland (61/3 innings).

Chin Music: Gio Gonzalez looks to snap winless streak

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 8/20/2011 5:47pm

A correction to my post below: The A's started four switch hitters tonight, not three — I left out catcher Landon Powell.

The wind is blowing pretty good at the Coliseum tonight. I wouldn't want to be chasing fly balls or pop-ups. ...

–It's an all-lefty lineup for the A's against Toronto right-hander Henderson Alvarez, though that includes switch hitters Jemile Weeks, Cliff Pennington and Coco Crisp. Just regular days off for Josh Willingham, Kurt Suzuki and Scott Sizemore.

An obvious storyline going into the game: Can Gio Gonzalez find the win column for the first time since July 17? A's manager Bob Melvin mentioned Gonzalez's focus is on trying to get deeper in the game. He's gone five starts without completing as many as seven innings.

–The lineups:

A's: Weeks 2B, Pennington SS, Crisp CF, Matsui DH, Allen 1B, Sweeney LF, DeJesus RF, Powell C, Sogard 3B; Gonzalez LHP.

Jays: Escobar SS, Thames LF, Bautista RF, Lind DH, Encarnacion 1B, Rasmus CF, Lawrie 3B, Molina C, McDonald 2B; Alvarez RHP.

A's Gio Gonzalez snaps his 5-game losing streak

Steve Kroner, Chronicle Staff Writer

-- Nothing like a chance meeting with the boss to provide a little extra motivation.

Such was the case for Gio Gonzalez in the A's 5-1 victory over Toronto at the Coliseum on Saturday night.

Gonzalez lugged a personal five-start losing streak to the mound. He struggled through a 25-pitch first inning, allowing a run, two hits, a walk and a hit batsman.

He got through the second in 1-2-3 fashion, then went into the clubhouse to put something on his arm. There he happened to run into general manager Billy Beane.

As Gonzalez recounted the story after the game, Beane told him, " 'I don't want to see you out here until the seventh inning.' I said, 'I'm going to try to go nine.' I guess it backfired; I went eight."

Gonzalez (10-11) was brilliant over his final seven innings, allowing only two more hits and needing a mere 75 pitches to negotiate those 21 outs.

According to manager Bob Melvin and Gonzalez, the lefty's success beginning with the second inning resulted much more from mind-set than arm slot. As Melvin put it, "I think he got a little tougher after the first inning."

If Gonzalez hadn't endured a crisis of confidence during his five-game skid, it was at least a mini-crisis. He acknowledged that pitching coach Ron Romanick "was in there the whole time, telling me, 'You've got to have that confidence. Keep going out there. We can see your composure's fine, but you need that flair that comes with it.' "

Gonzalez had enough flair to strike out nine, including the side in the third and seventh innings. He set down 15 men in a row from the third through the seventh.

And perhaps most important for someone who leads the majors with 73 walks allowed, that free pass he issued in the first inning was his lone walk of the night.

He had plenty of company in terms of people trying to boost his confidence. Gonzalez specifically mentioned Romanick, Melvin and catcher Landon Powell in that regard.

Said Gonzalez: "They wanted to see me going back out there and instead of looking into the bullpen and thinking, 'All right, well, let them go out and pitch for you,' it was more like, 'I've got this,' and you go out there and continue to try to pound the strike zone.

"I trust my bullpen 100 percent and I love 'em to death, but this is where I have to grow up and try to go out there and try to get my own outs."

Gonzalez would have liked to try to get the game's final three outs, but Melvin had told him as soon as the top of the eighth ended that Andrew Bailey would work the ninth. The A's were up only 2-1 in the eighth before scoring three times with two outs.

Melvin said had he known his team would pad its lead, he very well might have let Gonzalez try for his first complete game this season - the second of his career.

In any event, Gonzalez at the very least did what Beane wanted him to do.

"I didn't want to disappoint him," Gonzalez said.

A's trot out all-lefty lineup against Toronto

Steve Kroner, Chronicle Staff Writer

-- **Weeks, Pennington, Crisp, Matsui, Allen, Sweeney, DeJesus, Powell, Sogard.** That was your A's starting lineup against Toronto rookie right-hander **Henderson Alvarez** on Saturday night.

The kicker: All nine bat from the left side against Alvarez (Weeks, Pennington, Crisp and Powell are switch-hitters).

The A's have fared considerably better against lefty starters (21-20) than against righties (36-49), but manager **Bob Melvin** said his all-lefty lineup was no grand scheme.

The two most notable right-handed-hitting omissions were left fielder **Josh Willingham** and **Kurt Suzuki**, who entered Saturday tied for the AL lead in games started by a catcher (99).

Melvin figured to rest Suzuki either Saturday or today, and with left-hander **Luis Perez** starting for the Jays this afternoon, Saturday was the logical choice.

"The glaring (absence) is Willingham, being the big right-handed bat," Melvin said.

Willingham did play a central role in the A's 5-1 win. In the eighth inning, he pinch hit for **David DeJesus** and greeted lefty reliever **Rommie Lewis** with a two-run homer to left.

It was Willingham's 22nd home run of the season, his second in two nights and his ninth in his past 21 games. It was also the A's first pinch-hit HR of 2011.

Garner update: At the beginning of this homestand, Aug. 12, the A's hired **Phil Garner** as a special adviser. Melvin appreciates Garner's presence.

"He's gotten to know everybody very quickly," Melvin said. "He's got that infectious personality, where he's easy to talk to. ... He's been a great sounding board."

Garner spends time with players during batting practice, then watches games from the stands. He'll leave the team after today's game and then rejoin it in Cleveland at the end of the coming road trip. Melvin expects Garner to be with the club for most of September.

Briefly: Jose Bautista was a late scratch from the Jays' lineup because of neck tightness. He leads the majors in homers (35) and walks (102). ... Toronto rookie **Eric Thames**, a Bellarmine Prep alum, went 2-for-4, scored the Jays' run and picked up his first major-league steal.

Leading off

Tactful: At the end of his pregame news conference, A's manager Bob Melvin was asked if he rooted for the Raiders or 49ers as a kid. The Menlo Park native's response: "Don't do that. ... Both. ... I'll say Warriors, how's that?"

Drumbeat: All-lefty lineup

Steve Kroner at the Coliseum on a fireworks night: 5:07pm 8/20/2011

Weeks, 2B; Pennington, SS; Crisp, CF; Matsui, DH; Allen, 1B; Sweeney, LF; DeJesus, RF; Powell, C; Sogard, 3B. That's your A's starting lineup against Toronto rookie right-hander Henderson Alvarez tonight.

The kicker: All nine will bat from the left side against Alvarez (Weeks, Pennington, Crisp and Powell are switch-hitters).

Manager Bob Melvin says it's no grand scheme; catcher Kurt Suzuki was going to get a game off either tonight or tomorrow, and with lefty Luis Perez starting for the Jays tomorrow, it made sense to keep Suzuki on the bench this evening. Melvin acknowledged sitting Josh Willingham (eight HRs in his past 20 games) made for the most glaring absence from the lineup. One reason Willingham's on the bench: Melvin wanted to give Ryan Sweeney and David DeJesus some playing time.

A's starter Gio Gonzalez has lost his past five starts. In his most recent outing, the lefty limited Baltimore to a run on two hits through six innings Monday night, but gave up two hits and a walk to load the bases to open the seventh. Fautino De Los Santos allowed all three of those runners to score.

Melvin on Gonzalez for tonight: "The last start was pretty good until the last inning. ... I think, for the most part, he righted the ship in his performance. He'd like to ... pitch, for the most part, like he did last time."

Stellar Gio snaps five-start losing streak

A's southpaw fans nine, retires 15 straight Blue Jays at one point

By Willie Bans / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- In the first inning, it was one thing after another for A's starter Gio Gonzalez.

A hit batter to put two runners on with two outs, then an RBI single, then a walk to load the bases, then a visit at the mound by pitching coach Ron Romanick, then ... confidence?

After getting out of the jam by inducing a pop fly, retiring the side in the second and yielding a leadoff hit in the third inning Saturday, Gonzalez retired 15 straight and dominated the Blue Jays to break his five-start losing streak and guide the A's to a 5-1 win.

Gonzalez said it was as much Romanick and his team's praises as it was his four-seam fastball that got him composed and back to All-Star form.

Whether it was catcher Landon Powell's mixing of pitches or even general manager Billy Beane's challenge to Gonzalez -- after the second inning, when the pitcher visited the clubhouse to get something for his arm -- to not come back to the clubhouse until at least the seventh, it worked.

Gonzalez (10-11) had an All-Star line against Toronto (64-62): eight innings pitched, four hits allowed, one run, one walk and nine strikeouts.

"My composure has been a little rough after [the All-Star break]," Gonzalez said. "But little by little I started building and keeping my composure, and also building my confidence within every pitch."

Brandon Allen scored the decisive run in the fourth inning when he trotted home from third base on David DeJesus' double-play grounder. Oakland (57-69) has won four out of its past five games.

Meanwhile, Gonzalez rebounded after a previous five-start stretch in which he was 0-5 with a 7.90 ERA.

"I think he got a little tougher after the first inning," said A's manager Bob Melvin. "It looked like he had more focus and was really committed to what he was doing, and was more pitch to pitch than worrying about things that he can't control."

What he did control were the Toronto hitters, who were without their best. Jose Bautista (neck tightness) was a late scratch and No. 4 hitter Adam Lind needed X-rays after he was hit by Gonzalez on the right wrist in the opening frame.

Holding a one-run lead, Gonzalez struck out the side in the seventh and stranded the Blue Jays' John McDonald at second base the following frame by fanning both Eric Thames and Yunel Escobar.

Though Gonzalez allowed that first-inning run, the A's bats had his back in the bottom of the inning. Cliff Pennington doubled with one out, Coco Crisp singled, then Hideki Matsui singled in Pennington to knot the score.

Toronto starter Henderson Alvarez, who was hoping for his first career victory, let the A's sprinkle their seven hits against him through the first six innings and came away allowing two runs (one earned).

Yet the Blue Jays were unable to capitalize on Alvarez's solid outing or Gonzalez's brief rough patch.

"The last two nights in the first inning, they work out of some big jams," said Blue Jays manager John Farrell. "They've got strikeout capability, and that's what they were able to do."

With the starting pitchers setting the pace for most of the game, Oakland didn't add runs until the eighth with Ryan Sweeney's RBI single off reliever Jesse Litsch and Josh Willingham's no-doubter into the left-field stands off reliever Rommie Lewis.

It was Willingham's 22nd home run of the season --- this one in a pinch-hit role, which was also the team's first pinch-hit homer this season --- and his ninth in his past 21 games.

"It felt good, and I knew I hit it well," Willingham said. "It was a 2-2 count, and I was just battling. It was middle in and I was able to turn on it."

Gonzalez acknowledged Willingham's hot streak after the game, as well as the fact that the bullpen wasn't called on until closer Andrew Bailey came on in the ninth for a non-save situation.

They want to see me go back out there," Gonzalez said, "and instead of looking at the bullpen, thinking, 'Alright let them go out there and pitch,' it's more like, 'I got this. Let me go out there and continue to pound the strike zone.'

"I love my bullpen to death, but this is where I need to grow and learn and get my own outs."

Willingham comes off bench with 22nd homer

By Willie Bans / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- As manager Bob Melvin acknowledged, the A's most powerful bat was glaringly absent from Saturday's lineup.

But that didn't mean Josh Willingham wouldn't be available.

The right-handed hitter got some rest as a result of a heavily left-handed lineup facing Toronto right-hander Henderson Alvarez. But with the A's protecting a slim lead in the eighth inning, Willingham came off the bench and slugged a two-run homer -- his team-leading 22nd and ninth long ball in his past 21 games -- to secure a 5-1 victory.

Willingham batted cleanup Friday when he jacked his 21st homer in Oakland's 2-0 win over Toronto. Hideki Matsui slid into the cleanup spot Saturday after he was slotted third on Friday, going 2-for-4 with an RBI.

Meanwhile, the last four hitters in Saturday's lineup were different than the night before. Left fielder Ryan Sweeney batted sixth, followed by right fielder David DeJesus, catcher Landon Powell and third baseman Eric Sogard, who made his eighth start since being recalled from Triple-A Sacramento on July 15.

"We want to make sure we keep these guys healthy," Melvin said.

Worth noting

- Skipper Bob Melvin praised the job that former big league manager and recently hired Phil Garner has done in his role as special adviser to the team. "He's got that infectious personality where he's easy to talk to," Melvin said. "He's a sounding board for me. We go over particular moves we made during a game, what he sees in certain players. I think for the first time in a long time, he's watching games from the stands, and you get a different perspective."
- Melvin, raised in the Bay Area, was noncommittal when asked if he would be rooting for the San Francisco 49ers or Oakland Raiders in Saturday's preseason exhibition game. "Don't do that," he joked. "Both. I'll say Warriors, how's that? No, I like all the Bay Area teams."

Perez primed for first Major League start vs. A's

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com

It's a new beginning for Luis Perez.

The Blue Jays hope it's the start of something big.

The 26-year-old Perez, who has made 29 appearances out of the bullpen this season, is set to make his first Major League start when he takes the hill against Guillermo Moscoso and the A's in the series finale.

"[Perez] has got an ability to funnel and channel those emotions and that adrenaline into the strike zone," Blue Jays manager John Farrell said. "His composure since the first time he pitched for us has been very good. It has been outstanding. It has really allowed him to settle into a role of responsibility out of the bullpen, to the point of providing the opportunity for him to start."

Perez has confidence and experience as a starter. He went 2-2 with a 4.60 ERA in eight starts at the Triple-A level this season.

"I feel prepared because when I was in the Minor Leagues, even though it's a little bit different, I faced the lineup two or three times," Perez said. "I'm going to use all of my pitches -- fastball, changeup, slider -- and I can throw all those pitches at any time. Depending on who's hitting and how they're taking my approach, that's how I'm going to attack, but I'm always going to stay with this approach of pitching."

Moscoco he has picked up three wins in his past four starts, the most recent coming Tuesday against the Orioles. In that start, he allowed just two earned runs on five hits while fanning four over six innings.

"The last four or five outings, we've been doing a really good job," Moscoso said. "I've been making quality pitches, going deeper in the games. That's all I'm looking for."

Both pitchers expect a challenge.

"I've been doing a good job coming out of the bullpen and throwing in the Minor Leagues, but I was always prepared in the back of my mind," Perez said. "Always felt like the chance might come one day, so I was prepared for that."

Blue Jays: Bautista's status in doubt

- Jose Bautista was a last-minute scratch for Saturday's game against the A's because of tightness in his neck, and it's unknown if he will play in Sunday's finale.

The slugger suffered through similar symptoms with his neck earlier this season. He was removed from a game against the Yankees on May 1 and missed five games.

- Edwin Encarnacion went 1-for-4 on Saturday and has reached base safely in 18 of his past 19 games. He's hitting .344 during that stretch.

A's: Willingham gets a breather

- Josh Willingham was given Saturday off -- until he delivered a pinch-hit home run in the eighth inning -- but should return to the lineup Sunday. He leads the team with 22 jacks.

- Oakland's defense continues to be a work in progress. The club has committed 12 errors in its past 11 games and has 102 errors for the season.

Worth noting

- The A's have won four of their past five games and are 18-16 since the All-Star break.
- The A's are 5-4 against the Blue Jays this season. Toronto has still won 12 of the past 21 meetings, dating back to 2009.

Gonzalez ends skid, A's beat Blue Jays

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Gio Gonzalez had no intention of making this a short night, even after getting off to a rough start.

The A's All-Star left-hander felt so strong that he joked with general manager Billy Beane in between innings that he would go the distance.

It was about the only misjudgment he made.

Gonzalez pitched eight stellar innings for his first win in more than a month, and Oakland held on to beat the Toronto Blue Jays, 5-1, on Saturday night.

"It's what they wanted to see," said Gonzalez, who had lost his previous five starts before teaming with Andrew Bailey on the four-hitter. "Instead of looking into the bullpen, it was more like, 'I got this.' I trust my bullpen 100 percent and I love them to death but this is where I have to grow up and learn."

One day after Rich Harden and Bailey combined on a three-hitter, Gonzalez (10-11) and Bailey nearly duplicated it. The duo combined to retire 25 of the final 27 Toronto batters while helping Oakland to its fourth win in five games.

Gonzalez, in particular, was very sharp.

He allowed a one-out single to Thames in the first and hit designated hitter Adam Lind two batters later. Edwin Encarnacion then lined a single to right to drive in Thames, who beat the throw home from David De Jesus.

Colby Rasmus followed with a walk to load the bases but Gonzalez retired Brett Lawrie on a foul pop-up to first to work out of it.

After the second inning, Gonzalez jogged up to the A's clubhouse where he bumped into Beane. The general manager told his pitcher he didn't want to see Gonzalez again until after at least the seventh.

"I told him I was going to go nine, and (after) he said, 'You come in here popping off and you can't get nine,'" Gonzalez said. "That's the type of stuff we're building here. We're all having fun. We're still a work in progress but I'm striving to get better and better."

Toronto, held to three hits a night earlier, didn't get much else after that. Gonzalez gave up a leadoff single to Thames in the third then retired the next 15 straight until John McDonald's leadoff single in the eighth.

McDonald was sacrificed to second but Gonzalez — who hadn't won since July 17 — fanned Thames and Yunel Escobar to end the inning. Gonzalez finished with one walk and nine strikeouts.

"I think he'd had enough of what he's seeing as far as results go," Oakland manager Bob Melvin said of his pitcher. "He looked like he had a little more focus out there and was committed to what he was doing."

Eric Thames had two hits and scored the only run for Toronto, which played without slugger Jose Bautista then lost Lind after he was hit by the Gonzalez pitch in the first inning.

Bautista could be back in the lineup Sunday.

"This was more precautionary in nature," Toronto manager John Farrell said. "It started during batting practice. When we have to remove him before the game and then Lind goes down in his first at-bat (it) is a blow."

Brandon Allen had two hits and scored the go-ahead run on a double play in the fourth inning while Josh Willingham homered as part of a three-run eighth for Oakland, which has won four of five at home after getting swept in a four-game series by Texas.

Toronto starter Henderson Alvarez (0-1) suffered his first career loss despite a solid effort.

He allowed three consecutive hits in the bottom of the first, including Hideki Matsui's tying RBI single, then retired eight of the next nine until the A's scored an unearned run in the fourth.

Allen singled and took third after Toronto second baseman McDonald committed an error on Ryan Sweeney's grounder. Allen then scored the go-ahead run when David De Jesus hit into a 4-6-3 double play.

Alvarez, who made his major league debut against Oakland on Aug. 10, kept it close but left after six innings. He finished with three strikeouts and one walk.

Oakland scored three times in the eighth to break open the close game. Willingham capped the outburst with a two-run pinch-hit home run, his 22nd homer of the season. It's the first pinch-hit home run by an A's player this season.

Notes: Mike McCoy replaced Bautista in right field and hit in the leadoff spot. ... Less than a week after tearing his left hamstring, injured Blue Jays OF Rajai Davis has started running in Florida. Farrell continues to be hopeful that Davis can rejoin the team this season, though he acknowledged that the tear was "significant." ... SS Adeiny Hechavarria, one of Toronto's top minor league prospects, hit safely in his first eight games with Triple-A Las Vegas and went into Saturday batting .529 with one home run and five RBIs. ... RHP Guillermo Moscoso (6-6) pitches for Oakland on Sunday and will try to extend his personal winning streak to a career-best three games. His only win against Toronto came in relief on Aug. 11. ... LHP Luis Perez (2-2) makes his first career start for the Blue Jays, five days after throwing 61 pitches over four innings of relief and getting the win against Seattle.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento opens road trip with victory

By Alex Sadorf / Sacramento River Cats

A stellar seven-run first inning got the River Cats' nine-game road trip started on the right foot. The River Cats increased their lead to 9-5 to take the win over the Tucson Padres at Kino Veterans Memorial Stadium on Saturday night.

Center fielder Jermaine Mitchell singled with a line drive to center field off left-handed pitcher Rob Musgrave's second pitch of the game. Adrian Cardenas followed with a single of his own, a well placed bunt. Kevin Kouzmanoff also reached base off a fielder's choice and error to fill the bases for Chris Carter. Carter took care of business with a two-run single to center field.

The River Cats were not finished, however. With no outs and two runs on the board, Musgrave walked designated hitter Josh Donaldson to fill the bases for the second time. Michael Taylor then came to the plate and hit a hard ground ball to right field for a single, giving Kouzmanoff and Carter time to run home and putting Donaldson on third. Musgrave then walked his second Cat of the evening, Catcher Anthony Recker to reload the bases.

Musgrave finally got back on track with his pitching to strikeout the eighth batter of the inning, right fielder Jai Miller. His victory was short lived however as Musgrave hit the next batter, Adam Rosales, to send Donaldson home and give Rosales his 16th RBI of the season. The River Cats had a 5-0 lead with one out after batting through the lineup.

Mitchell returned to the plate only to be struck out by Musgrave for the second out in the first. Cardenas wasn't ready to end the inning though and singled off a fly ball to right field to score Recker and Taylor, his 41st and 42nd RBIs of the year. Musgrave finally got out of the first after giving up five hits and seven runs, only five of which were earned. Musgrave was replaced with right-handed Stiven Osuna in the second.

Sacramento added another run in the third after Osuna walked Mitchell and Cardenas got his sixth consecutive hit, an RBI double to center field. The River Cats had a very comfortable lead at 8-0. Saturday's game was Cardenas' team leading 36th multi-hit game of the season and his fourth four-hit game of the season, after a single in the seventh.

The Tucson Padres put themselves on the board in the third, with the help of former River Cat Steve Tolleson. Designated hitter Anthony Contreras got the first hit of the night off Tyson Ross, a single fly ball to right field. Ross then walked Drew Macias before Tolleson hit an RBI single to right field to score Contreras. The Padres were still behind, but on the board at 8-1.

The River Cats furthered their lead in the fourth with a sacrifice fly from Rosales to score Taylor. Taylor had singled earlier in the inning with a line drive to right field.

Tucson rallied in the fifth to put four more runs on the board. Pat McKenna started the rally with his first double of the season, a fly ball to center field. Contreras and Macias then followed with back-to-back RBI doubles. With no outs, Tolleson singled to center field and put Macias on third, ready for Anthony Rizzo to ground into a force out at second and Macias to run home. Rizzo would come home a little later on off a wild pitch from Ross. The Tucson rally wasn't enough to give them the lead, but victory was within reach for Tucson with a score of 9-5.

Tucson fought to the last out in the ninth for the win, but it wasn't enough. The Padres managed to load the bases for Pedro Feliz, but his ground out at first ended the game with the four-run deficit. The River Cats victory mathematically knocked the Padres out of playoff contention.

Tucson wasn't the only team struggling into the ninth. Las Vegas also attempted a comeback in the ninth against Fresno and got the score to within one, but weren't able to get the win. Las Vegas' loss in conjunction with the River Cats win puts Sacramento's magic number at five to clinch the playoffs.

Tucson and Sacramento face each other for Game 2 of this four-game series at 7 p.m. on Sunday evening. Listen to the game with Johnny Duskow on Talk 650 KSTE.

RockHounds' free fall continues against Naturals

Staff Reports, Midland Reporter-Telegram | Midland Reporter-Telegram |

SPRINGDALE -- The Midland RockHounds were nursing a one-run lead in the fifth of a game they desperately needed when Grant Green seemingly gave them a bit of breathing room with an RBI double.

But the Northwest Arkansas Naturals answered with five runs in the bottom of the inning to put away a game that was delayed but resumed with neither team scoring again in a 6-3 victory for the Naturals.

The loss dropped Midland seven games behind the first-place San Antonio Missions with Midland needing to pass the Missions in the remaining 16 games to make the playoffs.

The Naturals finally got to RockHounds starter Shawn Haviland in the fifth after Haviland pitched four scoreless innings to start the game.

A Christian Colon RBI double got it started, then Will Myers' two-run double gave the Naturals the first and only lead it needed to get the win.

Lancaster Shuts Out Stockton 3-0

Stockton Ports

The Stockton Ports failed to wow the sold-out crowd of 4,675 at Banner Island Ballpark as they were shutout 3-0 by the Lancaster JetHawks. The Ports have been shutout ten times in 2011, the most in the California League.

Ports starter Rob Gilliam (12-7) got the evening started quickly getting back-to-back strikeouts. Gilliam kept the JetHawks off the board for 3.0 innings before giving up a single to Austin Wates to begin the fourth inning. Gilliam then gave up what would become the game-winning run to Jonathon Singleton, as Singleton blasted the first pitch of his at-bat over the center field wall.

The JetHawks tacked on an extra run in the fifth inning, also by way of the long ball. With one out in the inning, Jio Mier worked a 3-2 count before launching a solo home run over the left field wall for the final run of the game.

The Ports were threatened to score several times late in the game. In the sixth inning, the Ports had Myrio Richard at third with two outs, only to leave him stranded. In the seventh, the Ports had their best opportunity. Anthony Aliotti singled to begin the inning, and bring his on-base streak to 45 games. One out later, Petey Paramore singled, and an out after that, pinch hitter Rashun Dixon walked to load the bases. Sadly for the Ports, Leonardo Gil struck out and left all three men stranded to end their final offensive threat of the game.

Back on the mound, left-hander AJ Huttenlocker replaced Gilliam in the sixth inning, and pitched 2.0 scoreless innings. Huttenlocker gave up just one hit and one walk while recording a strikeout in the appearance. Josh Lansford replaced Huttenlocker in the eighth, and also pitched 2.0 scoreless innings, recording two strikeouts.

The Ports look to avoid the series sweep tomorrow evening as right-handers AJ Griffin and Zach Grimmatt face off in the final game of the series at 6:05 p.m.

Bees Win Big on IA National Guard Night

By Jon Versteeg, Burlington Bees

BURLINGTON, IA-The Burlington Bees (22-32) scored four runs in the sixth inning to cement a 9-1 win over the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers (22-32) before 1,115 fans at Community Field on Saturday night.

The Timber Rattlers scored a run in the second inning. LF Jason Rogers (1-3) walked and scored on a triple by RF Chad Stang (2-3) for a 1-0 lead.

The Burlington Bees scored a run in the second inning to tie the game at 1-1. SS Yordy Cabrera (1-5) led off the inning with a single and went to second base on a groundout by LF Royce Consigli (1-4). Cabrera stole third base and scored on a sacrifice fly by 2B Ryan Pineda (1-3) for a 1-1 tied score.

The Bees scored two runs in both the third and fourth innings to take a 5-1 lead. C Beau Taylor (1-2) hit a one-out double in the third inning and moved to third base on a single by DH Nino Leyja (2-4), who quickly stole second base. RF Josh Whitaker (1-5) lined a two-run single to score both men.

Pineda was hit by a pitch with one out in the fourth inning. He went to second base on a single by 3B Wade Kirkland (2-4). CF Tyreace House (1-3) singled Pineda home for a 4-1 lead. Both Kirkland and House each advanced one base on a throwing error by Wisconsin CF Reggie Keen. Taylor hit a sacrifice fly to score Kirkland for a 5-1 lead.

The Bees took advantage of two walks to score four runs in the sixth inning and earn a 9-1 lead. 1B A.J. Kirby-Jones (1-4) hit a bases-clearing double to round out the scoring at 9-1.

RHP Jose Macias (6-3) allowed one run on five hits to earn the win for Burlington.

The Bees and Timber Rattlers play game two of their series on Sunday afternoon at 2:00 p.m. It's "Louisa Communications Kids Day" with all kids 12 and under getting in free and running the bases after the game. It's also "Faith Day" with fans receiving one dollar off up to four general admission tickets when they present their church bulletin to the Community Field Box Office upon purchasing tickets. Fort Madison and Keokuk Community Weekend wraps up with discount ticket offers for all residents upon presentation of their ID to the Box Office. RHP Brooks Hall (6-4, 3.35) gets the start for Wisconsin against RHP Blake Hassebrock (7-7, 2.49) for the Bees. Pre-game coverage starts at 1:40 p.m. on AM 1490 KBUR and online at gobees.com.

2011 Bees tickets are on sale now! To single game tickets, or playoff tickets for game two of the first round of the Midwest League playoffs on September 8, 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.

Vermont Beats Hudson Valley 14-4

By Paul Stanfield / Vermont Lake Monsters

BURLINGTON, VT --- The Vermont Lake Monsters scored a season-high 14 runs, their most runs scored at home since 2005, for a 14-4 New York-Penn League victory over the Hudson Valley Renegades Saturday night at historic Centennial Field.

The Lake Monsters got a pair of runs in the bottom of the first on a RBI singles from Nick Rickles, extending his hitting streak to 14 games, and Jordan Tripp for a 2-0 advantage. Vermont led 3-1 when Dusty Robinson connected for his third home run of the season, a three-run homer to left field.

The Renegades got a two-run homer from Alejandro Segovia with two outs in the fifth to knock Vermont starter Kurt Wunderlich from the game. Wunderlich gave up three runs (two earned) over 4 2/3 innings for the no-decision, while reliever Logan Chitwood (2-0) allowed one run on one hit over 2 2/3 innings for the victory.

Vermont added three runs to their lead in the sixth on a Sean Jamieson two-run single and another RBI single for Rickles. Jamieson reached base safely in all six plate appearances in the game, going 2-for-2 with one walk and three hit by pitches. The Lake Monsters got their 10th run of the game in the seventh on an Aaron Shipman RBI infield single.

Tripp hit a two-run homer, his fifth of the season, for a 12-4 lead in the eighth and went 3-for-5 with two runs and three RBI on the night. Shipman capped off the scoring with a two-out, two-run single to center later in the inning. Shipman was 3-for-5 with four RBI, the first time this season that a Lake Monster has had more than three RBI in a game.

The 14 runs were the most in a game for Vermont since a 14-7 win at Auburn on August 5, 2009 and the most runs in a game at Centennial for the Lake Monsters since a 14-10 victory over Aberdeen on July 20, 2005.

Vermont (31-28) has won three straight and six of its last seven to remain 1 1/2 games in front of the Connecticut Tigers for first-place in the Stedler Division. The Lake Monsters will host Hudson Valley in the second of the three-game series at Centennial on Sunday afternoon beginning at 1:05 pm.