

Oakland A's defense shows off the good, bad and ugly in loss to Los Angeles Angels

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Fans got a full sampling Wednesday of all the A's defense can offer.

Highlight plays were turned in all over the infield early in the game. Then the comic relief arrived in the eighth inning, as the A's committed back-to-back errors in the Los Angeles Angels' final scoring rally.

A 4-1 defeat illustrated the Jekyll-and-Hyde nature of the A's defense, which was perceived as a strength before the season but has proved maddeningly inconsistent.

Manager Bob Melvin was clearly irked by his team's glove work during his postgame news conference.

It wasn't the first time.

"It has been, for me, the biggest weakness in the club this year," Melvin said. "There's a lot of effects from (bad defense). Psychologically the momentum shifts because of it. There's a lot of ways that errors make a team struggle."

Two errors Wednesday brought the A's total to 119, most in the American League and their most since the 2001 team made 125. Those mistakes have led to a major league-high 80 unearned runs.

It's alarming in that A's officials believed they had built an airtight defensive unit for this season.

Former manager Bob Geren, replaced by Melvin on June 9, felt particularly confident in his infield defense back in spring training.

But third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff and first baseman Daric Barton combined for 17 errors before they were dispatched to the minors in June (Kouzmanoff has since been traded to Colorado). Cliff Pennington's 21 errors are second-most among A.L. shortstops.

Rookie Jemile Weeks, who took over second base June 7 and brought upon the trade of Mark Ellis, leads A.L. second basemen with 12 errors despite spending the first two-plus months in the minors.

But the A's defensive woes can't be pinned on any one player, and that's the problem.

The miscues have been widely distributed, with the pitching staff -- which has committed a league-high 18 errors -- joining in.

"It's probably different between each guy," said Scott Sizemore, who assumed third-base duties from Kouzmanoff. "I guarantee you there probably haven't been two errors on the same play all year. It's just that sometimes you don't make them, whether you take your eye off the ball, bring your glove up, whatever the case may be."

Defensive improvement will be an emphasis with Melvin next season if he's hired as the full-time manager, which is widely assumed will happen.

Early on Wednesday, it seemed some defensive gems might help right-hander Rich Harden to a victory.

Pennington made a diving backhanded stop deep in the hole in the second, then threw on one bounce to first -- with first baseman Brandon Allen making the scoop -- to rob Mark Trumbo.

In the third, second baseman Eric Sogard -- who spelled Weeks -- made an outstanding leaping catch of Erick Aybar's liner.

After Josh Willingham's 26th homer (tying his season best) off Jered Weaver (17-7) put the A's up 1-0, Allen made a diving catch in the fourth to rob Alberto Callaspo of extra bases with a runner on second.

The Angels took a 3-1 lead off Harden (4-3) in the sixth, including Trumbo's two-run homer.

Then the Angels pushed across an insurance run in the eighth with help from the A's. With runners on the corners and two outs, Trumbo stole second. A's catcher Kurt Suzuki made an accurate throw, but the ball deflected off Sogard's glove far enough into center field to allow Bobby Abreu to score.

Moments later, Sizemore booted Callaspo's hard grounder.

"We've definitely made more errors than we want to make, more errors than we should," Pennington said. "We've gotta keep working at it."

Oakland A's update: Team's 2012 schedule features two weekend visits each by New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox.

By Joe Stiglich

The release of the A's 2012 regular season schedule brought good news for the attendance-starved team.

They will host the New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox -- the major leagues' top-drawing road teams over the past decade -- for two series each, and both Yankees series fall on the weekend.

That's in stark contrast to this season, when the Yankees and Red Sox played a combined five games in Oakland, all during weekdays.

The Yankees will visit for a three-game set May 25-27 and a four-game series July 19-22. Boston comes to town for three-game series July 2-4 and Aug. 31-Sept. 2.

As usual, the A's and Giants will play six times -- May 18-20 at AT&T Park and June 22-24 in Oakland.

The A's will open at home April 6 against the Seattle Mariners. They host San Diego and the Los Angeles Dodgers in interleague play and travel to Arizona and Colorado.

Earlier drafts of the schedule had the A's traveling to San Diego and hosting Arizona.

Center fielder Ryan Sweeney left Wednesday's 4-1 loss to the Angels with a strained right quadriceps, and his season could be over.

The A's have 13 games left, and manager Bob Melvin said he's "guessing it's going to be a little while" before Sweeney returns.

Sweeney has ridden the bench most of the season but recently was handling center field with Coco Crisp nursing a sore ankle. "This whole year has been frustrating for me -- mentally, then physically I guess," Sweeney said.

Melvin said he's hopeful Crisp could return as soon as Thursday.

Reliever Michael Wuertz has struggled mightily in four outings since coming off the D.L. for a thumb injury, allowing eight hits and seven earned runs in two innings.

"Bob's put me in some good situations to perform, and obviously I haven't done it," Wuertz said. "It's definitely frustrating." Wuertz has a 6.48 ERA in 38 games.

The Detroit Tigers arrive Thursday for a four-game series having won 12 straight, their longest winning streak in 77 years. Detroit's magic number to win the A.L. Central is two, meaning they can clinch in Oakland.

Josh Willingham hit his 26th homer, tying his career high.

Chin Music: Lineups and a look at the A's 2012 schedule

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 9/14/2011 12:22pm

The lineups for the A's-Angels series finale:

A's — Pennington SS, Suzuki C, Matsui DH, Willingham LF, DeJesus RF, Sizemore 3B, Sweeney CF, Allen 1B, Sogard 2B; Harden RHP.

Angels — Aybar SS, Kendrick 2B, Abreu DH, Hunter RF, Trumbo 1B, Callaspo 3B, Wells LF, Bourjos CF, Mathis C; Weaver RHP.

—It's just a regular day off for Jemile Weeks. Manager Bob Melvin said he thought Weeks showed a bit of fatigue last night and wanted to give him a rest.

—In case you haven't seen it, here's the A's 2012 schedule, just released this morning. There's a significant change from earlier drafts of the schedule, pertaining to Oakland's interleague opponents. The A's will travel to Arizona and Colorado, and they'll host the Dodgers and San Diego Padres. ...

Free-agency decisions face A's, who lose 4-1

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

OAKLAND -- With "Moneyball" opening a week from Friday and the national premiere in Oakland on Monday, perhaps it makes sense that this year's A's will have a multitude of offseason decisions to make.

After all, "Moneyball" the movie looks at the way Oakland's front office approached personnel decisions with some non-traditional thinking, and "Moneyball" the book also focused on the 2002 draft, in which the A's had seven picks before the second round after losing numerous big-name free agents.

This winter, Oakland has another big crop of free agents and is bound to lose a few - but only one, Josh Willingham, would bring back an additional first-round pick should the A's lose him. Willingham, who tied his career high for homers in the A's 4-1 loss to the Angels on Wednesday at the Coliseum, has said that he'd like to return to Oakland, but that doesn't guarantee anything. Few free agents ever indicate otherwise - it wouldn't be smart negotiating to rule out any team - and with 26 homers and 91 RBIs, Willingham is likely to get attractive offers elsewhere.

Oakland won't discuss potential deals with any of their pending free agents until after the season, but the team does have an exclusive window to talk to them until five days after the World Series.

The only other player who would bring an additional draft pick, at this point, is outfielder David DeJesus, currently projected as a Type-B free agent. Coco Crisp and Hideki Matsui are on the cusp of reaching Type-B status but not quite there in the most recent projections. Wednesday's starter, Rich Harden, also will be an unranked free agent.

Plus, the A's have a team option on reliever Michael Wuertz, which had appeared as if it would be a no-brainer given Wuertz's standout 2009 season, but the right-hander's numbers have regressed as injuries cut his innings in half over the past two seasons. He went from a 6-1 record and 2.63 ERA two years ago to a 4.31 ERA last year and a 6.48 ERA this season.

Since returning from his second stay on the disabled list this season on Sept. 2, Wuertz has allowed seven runs in two innings, but he said before Wednesday's game that he is entirely healthy, with no issue with the thumb soreness that sidelined him for August.

His contract status, though, might be bothering him, "especially because this is one month I'm trying to make a good impression, show that I'm healthy," Wuertz said. "It's one of those things where I'm probably putting a little added pressure on myself."

Willingham's homer in the third off Jered Weaver provided the A's only run Wednesday. Harden allowed three runs, all in the sixth inning, with two coming on Mark Trumbo's homer to left.

Harden, who is 4-3 with a 4.76 ERA, considers Oakland a good fit and he likes working with pitching coach Ron Romanick, so he'd be likely to return depending on his health and on the A's interest.

A's Ryan Sweeney injured, Coco Crisp near return

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Ryan Sweeney pulled up limping while running out a grounder in the sixth inning Wednesday and said after the game that it is a Grade 1 right quadriceps strain.

Quad strains typically require 10 days to six weeks of recovery time, and given Sweeney's right knee surgery a year ago, it's possible his season is over.

"This whole season has been frustrating mentally and now physically," said Sweeney, whose playing time had been limited until **Coco Crisp's** recent foot injury.

The A's might have an unexpected replacement in center field, though: Crisp hit in the cage Wednesday and manager **Bob Melvin** said he might be able to play tonight against Detroit, sooner than expected after missing the past five games with the same right foot soreness that had limited him on the previous homestand.

Schedule info: From a rears-in-seats standpoint, the 2012 schedule is not a bad one for the A's, who draw best against the Giants, Yankees and Red Sox.

Oakland has weekend series against all three, and Boston and New York both will make two visits to the Coliseum. New York is scheduled for weekend series May 25-27 and July 19-22. Boston will be in town July 2-4 and Aug. 31-Sept. 2.

This season, the A's averaged 30,699 fans against San Francisco, Boston and New York, and 16,986 against everyone else. Even so, the team's attendance is expected to top last year's, and that is despite the July 16 doubleheader that counted as one date.

For the fourth consecutive year, the A's will not raise season-ticket prices.

Briefly: The A's recorded loss 82, giving them losing records in four of the past five seasons. They were 81-81 last year. ... Oakland's 119 errors lead the league.

Leading off

Inconsistent afield: Oakland got terrific defense early, particularly from shortstop Cliff Pennington and second baseman Eric Sogard, who leaped sky-high for a liner in the third. But Sogard and Scott Sizemore made errors in the eighth, and manager Bob Melvin called defense the club's "biggest weakness" afterward.

Banged up A's come up short in finale with Halos

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Only 13 games remain on the A's calendar following Wednesday's 4-1 defeat and ensuing series loss to the Angels.

Ten of them are against playoff hopefuls, meaning the going won't get any easier for an already banged-up Oakland club.

Coco Crisp has been sidelined with right ankle soreness, and his fill-in, Ryan Sweeney, exited Wednesday's contest with an upper quad strain and is now questionable for the rest of the season. Jemile Weeks was also rested for the day's series finale -- aside from a ninth-inning, pinch-hit at-bat -- after showing some fatigue as of late.

It's a feeling many of his teammates are likely akin to at the moment, as are most players around this time of year. So the excuses are minimal, as the A's are expected to continually showcase their best performance -- especially against contenders.

Josh Willingham has done his part, collecting 16 hits in his last 47 at-bats, the last of which was a solo shot off Angels ace Jered Weaver in the third inning, marking his career-high-tying 26th home run of the season, along with his career-high 91st RBI.

But the left fielder was the lone offensive contributor in the affair, as the A's were otherwise shut down by Weaver, who scattered six hits over seven innings of work, while walking two and fanning one en route to picking up his career-high 17th win of the year.

It was a familiar scene, one seen just a night earlier, when the A's went 4-for-11 with runners in scoring position. This time, they came up empty in such situations -- going 0-for-7 while stranding nine.

"I think we've been pretty consistent the second half offensively," manager Bob Melvin said. "The last couple of games, we haven't been as good. But there's no question, Josh has been the key in the middle of the lineup."

Those very woes helped Weaver improve to 3-0 with a 1.24 ERA in four starts against the green and gold this season.

Righty Rich Harden, meanwhile, kept the Angels off the board through the first five innings -- with help from a handful of tremendous defensive plays in the infield -- before allowing the Halos to post a three-spot in the sixth and gain a permanent lead.

Howard Kendrick led off the frame with a walk, and scored on an ensuing RBI double off the bat of Bobby Abreu, who also crossed home plate just minutes later when Mark Trumbo belted his 27th homer of the year off Harden with one out -- a two-run shot to left-center to break a 1-1 tie.

"I got behind some hitters and, 0-2, made a bad pitch," Harden said. "I basically wanted to bounce that pitch. And if I throw it down -- start it low in the zone and it breaks down -- it's a swing and miss. But I just left it up.

"It's really frustrating. That's kind of been the story of my year, so far -- making pitches late in the game and mistakes here or there that have cost me. That's what I gotta change."

Said Trumbo: "I was kind of sitting between speeds. I really want to take advantage of offspeed pitches in the middle that I can handle. I kind of told myself, 'I've been here before, done it before.' I was a tad out front, but still got it on the good part of the bat. I've got to use that part of the field more often."

Los Angeles padded its lead in the eighth, when Abreu walked, moved to third on Trumbo's base hit and scored courtesy of an error by second baseman Eric Sogard while Trumbo stole second base.

Scott Sizemore also made a fielding error in the same inning, giving the A's two on the day -- after their gloves had previously not only produced flawless work, but spectacular plays in the first half of the game.

"That's just kind of the way our season's gone," Harden said. "It's been up and down. You feel the energy early, with guys making nice plays, and then I give up a couple and now we're down. You can feel the difference on the field, especially with Weaver on the mound. It gets to you."

Oakland has now made nine errors in the last seven games, giving it a combined 119 on the season, which is second most in the Majors to the Cubs, who have racked up 124. Melvin called the club's defensive lapses "the biggest weakness" this year.

"There are a lot of effects because of it," he said. "Psychologically, the momentum shifts because of it. We continue to work ad nauseam and, hypothetically, next spring, it is going to be a No. 1 priority."

In the meantime, the A's will have to finish out a campaign that will now be officially marked with a losing record, as their latest defeat moved them to 67-82 on the season. They play host to the AL Central-leading Tigers, who narrowed their magic number to three on Wednesday with a win -- meaning they could clinch a postseason berth while in Oakland this weekend.

"If you have the opportunity to hold them off and not have them do it at your place," Melvin said, "that's probably the better of the two outcomes."

A's kick off '12 in Oakland vs. Mariners

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The 2012 Major League Baseball schedule was released on Wednesday, and the A's learned they'll start the year just as they're slated to finish the 2011 campaign, engaging in play with the Mariners.

The setting will be different, though, as Oakland -- set to travel to Seattle at month's end -- will host the three-game set, which will begin April 6 and be part of a season-opening six-game homestand that includes three contests against the Royals.

The A's will then hit the road on an American League West-themed trip through Seattle and Los Angeles -- the latter series will feature four games against the Halos -- before returning home to welcome the Indians and White Sox.

An ensuing nine-game swing through Baltimore, Boston and St. Petersburg will mark one of four trips the A's will make to the East Coast, as they'll pay visits to the Orioles and Rays twice during the season, while visiting the Blue Jays, Red Sox and Yankees just once.

That's good news for A's fans, who will be treated to two Yankees series in Oakland, the first coming at the end of May and the second, a four-game set, scheduled for mid-July. The Red Sox also make two trips, theirs coming in a span of as many months (July 2-4, Aug. 31-Sept. 2).

Perhaps just as popular will be Oakland's guests during Interleague Play, as the Padres, Dodgers and Giants will come in order beginning June 15 -- marking a span of nine games with National League opponents that proceeds a trip through Arizona and Colorado.

By that time, the A's will have already paid their yearly visit to San Francisco, where they're slated for three games May 18-20 to build upon the existing Bay Bridge rivalry.

The longest homestand of the year features 10 games and stretches from July 30 to Aug. 8, a time during which the Coliseum will house the Rays, Blue Jays and Angels. The final homestand, meanwhile, will feature six contests, three each with Seattle and Texas.

The Rangers, who have fueled an already existing divisional rivalry thanks to pitcher C.J. Wilson's less-than-flattering comments about Oakland, will also be in town June 5-7 and July 16-18, while the A's will look for better luck in the Lone Star State in 2012 during May and June stays.

Tigers on the hunt for 13th straight win against A's

By Jon Star / MLB.com

The Tigers entered September with a relatively comfortable 5 1/2-game lead in the American League Central. Two weeks later, Detroit has run away with the division thanks to a 12-game winning streak -- the franchise's longest since 1934 -- with their rivals shrinking in the rearview mirror and their magic number down to two.

The winning streak means that Jim Leyland's club is closing in on a chance to clinch the franchise's first postseason berth since 2006 and its first divisional title since 1987 when it was a member of the AL East.

With a clinching celebration potentially this weekend in Oakland, the Tigers have the flexibility to gain valuable rest down the stretch. However, Leyland is not ready to take his foot off the accelerator.

"We've got a little something going, we've got to keep it going. We'll have to work [hard] to keep it going, but it's been a lot of fun."

Victor Martinez has been a significant part of the Tigers' September surge. Martinez, who went 2-for-4 with a walk on Wednesday, is hitting .386 (17-for-44) with three home runs, 17 RBIs and six multihit games in his last 11 starts.

"It's a long season, obviously, and there's a lot of ups and downs, and you just don't know what's going to happen the rest of the season, so I'll definitely enjoy it and keep playing the game," Martinez explained.

He and the rest of the Tigers will aim to extend the win streak to 13 games behind Max Scherzer, who has put together back-to-back strong starts. Scherzer has allowed just two earned runs on 10 hits in 14 innings (seven per start) with 12 strikeouts. The right-hander has not faced Oakland this season, but blanked the A's for 5 2/3 innings with 14 strikeouts on May 30, 2010.

Countering Scherzer in the series opener will be Brandon McCarthy, who is also riding a hot hand. Though 2-2 in his previous four outings, McCarthy has posted a 2.35 ERA and kept the opposition to a .196 batting average (22 hits in 30 2/3 innings). Oakland will not only look for the win behind McCarthy, but a chance to snap the Tigers' streak and keep them from celebrating a division title in the Coliseum.

"Certainly you don't want them celebrating on your field and in your clubhouses, but having said that, I've seen that happen before," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "I think the younger players, the catch-22 is they get to see something that we would like to do. But if you have the opportunity to hold them off and not have them do it at your place, that's probably the better of the two outcomes."

Tigers: Cabrera nearing rare club milestone

Miguel Cabrera has battered AL pitching since Aug. 1, hitting .387 (60-for-155) with four home runs, 29 RBIs and 18 doubles in that stretch. In addition to his summer surge, the magic number for Cabrera appears to be 100. The first baseman needs three RBIs and two walks to go with his 102 runs scored to become the fifth player in Tigers history to eclipse 100 in those three categories. The other Tigers to accomplish the feat were Rocky Colavito and Norm Cash, both in 1961, Hank Greenberg ('37, '38) and Charlie Gehringer ('38).

Athletics: Crisp's timetable clears up

- Coco Crisp, who is nursing a sore right ankle, could potentially return during the Tigers series barring any further setbacks. He was set to try hitting in the cages on Wednesday morning and Melvin said that, if all went well, he wouldn't be surprised if the center fielder was back in action by this weekend.

- Josh Willingham has provided needed thunder to the A's lineup. Over the last 11 games, Willingham is hitting .371 (13-for-35) with four home runs, 13 RBIs, six runs scored and three doubles. With his two RBIs on Tuesday, Willingham set a new career high, surpassing his previous best of 89 RBIs, which he reached in 2007 with the Marlins. Willingham extended his 2011 RBI total to 91 with his solo home run on Wednesday.

Worth noting:

- The A's have used 48 different players this season. Oakland has not used fewer than 49 players over the course of a season since 2006 (40 players). The A's have used 26 pitchers, tying the most used by the franchise since its move to Oakland. The franchise record is 27 pitchers by the 1915 Philadelphia A's and the 1955 Kansas City A's.

- The Tigers bullpen has a 2.04 ERA (27 ER in 119 innings) and 112 strikeouts since Aug. 4, including four shutout innings on Wednesday.

Sweeney strains upper right quad

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- After exiting Wednesday's game in the sixth inning with an upper right quad strain -- pain situated above the knee he had surgically repaired in the offseason -- Ryan Sweeney offered a simple solution.

"Cut my right leg off, I guess," he said, offering a half-hearted smile.

Sweeney's already endured a season defined by limited playing time. And now, because of the injury, his season may have reached a premature end. The A's are likely to take a cautious approach with him.

He departed after sustaining the injury while grounding out in the sixth inning, and was replaced in center field by Jai Miller.

"It's the same leg as the surgery I had, so the doctor basically said the muscle above my knee is small, probably putting pressure on the rest of my quad," Sweeney said. "It was spazzing a little bit on me when I was running, but I didn't really think anything of it. And then when I ran to first, I felt it tighten up."

Sweeney was in the midst of his fifth straight start in center field, and was expected to garner more playing time while Coco Crisp continued to nurse a sore right ankle. The timing, then, couldn't have been any worse for the former everyday player.

"This whole year has been frustrating for me, just mentally -- and now physically -- I guess," he said. "To be able to get more playing time and hurt my leg, I'll just have to work hard to make it better, I guess."

Sweeney will use the offseason to avoid similar issues in the future.

"I've been having some issues, above the knee has been tight," he said. "I rehabbed, but I haven't had the chance to build my quad and leg up. So this offseason, I'll do a lot of strength training to try to get my legs to where they need to be."

Weeks gets rare day off Wednesday

OAKLAND -- Jemile Weeks received a rare day of rest from his grinding rookie campaign on Wednesday.

The A's second baseman, who grabbed his hamstring after fouling a pitch off of it during Saturday's game in Texas, was showing signs of the long season, manager Bob Melvin said.

"He's still got a little soreness up high where he had the cramp," said the A's skipper, who started Eric Sogard at second base. "It just didn't look to me [on Tuesday] like he really had his legs underneath him."

Weeks has started 84 of the A's 88 games at second base since he was selected from Triple-A Sacramento on June 7, and has made each of his last 74 starts in the leadoff spot, where he's provided consistent production.

The 24-year-old, who is batting .357 with eight multi-hit games over his last 19 contests, leads American League rookies in triples (8), ranks second in stolen bases (21) and third in hits (107) and doubles (23), despite spending the first two months of the season in a Minor League uniform. And even though he doesn't have enough plate appearances to qualify among the league leaders, his .301 batting average is the best among AL rookies with at least 350 plate appearances.

"I wanted him thinking when he came in he's an everyday player," Melvin said. "This has been a lot for him. If you're going to be an everyday player, you play with some aches and pains, and he's done that well. He prepares himself very well, and there's been a lot thrown on his plate this year, and he's handled it extremely well.

"He's a little worn down, right now. So [with] a day off, hopefully, we get him back to close to 100 percent."

Crisp could return during series vs. Tigers

OAKLAND -- While there was first speculation about Coco Crisp sitting out the rest of the season and then hope of him returning at some point, there's suddenly a possibility that he could return as early as Thursday.

A's manager Bob Melvin said the outfielder hit in the cage on Wednesday morning and all went well, meaning he's on track to potentially play in the four-game set against the Tigers.

"If he feels good, I wouldn't be shocked to maybe see him in the Detroit series at some point," Melvin said. "I'm certainly not trying to put any pressure on him. We're going to have to see how [everything] goes, and I may change my tune, but I don't think it's out of the question he might be able to play at some point in time during that series."

That's good news for the A's, who watched fill-in Ryan Sweeney go down with an injury in Wednesday's loss to the Angels. His departure led Melvin to insert Jai Miller in center field, and the A's callup came just inches shy of a home run in the ninth inning.

It's not just point and click for MLB photogs

By Mark Newman / MLB.com

Being a Major League Baseball photographer looks so easy.

They are down by the field and right beside the players from Opening Day through the World Series. They have the best equipment and can transmit quickly for eager clients. Their gorgeous and sometimes iconic images show up on MLBPhotos.com, where fans can search for them by player and even frame them for shipping with a custom team logo ... while the average fan is happy just to share a grainy pic on social networks.

Meet Elsa Garrison and Doug Pensinger, a couple of veteran Getty Images staff photographers who love what they do and assure you it is not as easy as it looks. Her MLB base is Fenway Park and his is Coors Field. Each lives in a world of ever-increasing client demand, of foul liners that could break your jaw while you are looking down to upload pics into your laptop at the wrong time, of anticipation, knowing when to chance a more artistic vantage point at the risk of missing "The Shot" from the first-base photo well.

"There are some people who say, 'I could do that job,'" said Garrison, in the business for 15 years. "They look at being a photographer, especially baseball, and think, 'Oh, that must be an easy gig. You get to watch the game.' You don't get to watch the game. You are, but you aren't. It's not like you're *watching* the game, enjoying it and having a great time. Don't get me wrong, I love baseball. But if I miss something, I feel [bad]. Hopefully, people who look at these pictures are appreciating great photography and the work everybody does."

"The whole digital evolution, it made things easier, but at the same time, you've got to work harder," Pensinger said. "It's the demands of the media, with the Internet, including MLB.com, all the newspaper websites. They want to update during the course of the game. And they want to see pictures out there during the course of the game. So you've got to balance when and how you're going to work and when you have to turn your back on the game for a half-inning or something to get pictures out. So you've got to choose that time wisely. And, working sometimes from the photo wells themselves, you also have to be diligent about safety in the process."

Once upon a time, photographers crouched down on the foul ground perilously close to a batter, a flash exploding in hopes of capturing an image that could make a daily or weekly publication. It's a long way from Charles Conlon's classic portraits of Babe Ruth. It's a long way since that 1986 World Series Game 6 shot of the ball dribbling through Bill Buckner's legs -- developed in chemicals inside a ballpark darkroom and taken for next-morning papers before becoming a glossy photo that both Buckner and Mookie Wilson would sign for decades.

Being a baseball photographer has continued to evolve, even a decade after digital cameras became standard operating procedure. There were more requests for photo credentials at MLB ballparks in 2011 than in any previous season, and those who get the much-desired access view it as both an art and a science.

Patience and persistence: Two case studies

Fenway Park is nearly 100 years old, and it still leaves people breathless the first time they step through its gates. For Garrison, who likes older stadiums with character, it is "a great place to shoot." At the same time, she knows that John Updike was right when he called it a "lyric little bandbox." There are only so many places you can search out for new angles.

"It is old. You can kind of wander around a little bit and kind of find different angles, but there are not a lot of places to go," Garrison said. "It's a different work flow. The one thing about it being a smaller park, you definitely have to pay attention -- especially in the playoffs, with one of those inner wells, as baseballs fly at your head. Especially if a lefty is pulling the ball and you're on the [first-base] side. David Ortiz, he could pull and it could end badly."

It was one of those moments on Aug. 1, 2010, when Garrison decided to find something literally above and beyond.

She found it up next to the press box: **a wide shot of a walk-off**, capturing the sharpness of celebrating players down on the well-lit field with the foreground silhouette of upper-deck fans. Jonathan Papelbon had blown a 3-0 lead against Detroit in the top of the ninth. In the bottom of the inning, with men at first and second, Marco Scutaro laid down a bunt that was thrown wildly to first by Detroit reliever Robbie Weinhardt, allowing Darnell McDonald to score the winner.

"I think the thing that separates Getty photographers from the rest is that we are given the freedom to find a different picture and take risks," Garrison said. "That picture could have been a complete bust. [Boston] could have lost the game. If that were the case, I would not have been hassled by my editors for missing the last out at field level. Not everyone has the luxury.

"There are some times where I can say, 'Well, I did well that game.' I like to look at historical baseball photography, and one picture I always liked was shot at Yankee Stadium, a vantage point from high, where you saw the fans cheering up top. I always thought that would be nice to do. I'd wanted to see if I could get that idea to work at Fenway. Well, the light was nice that day. I went near the press box in the upper deck. The fans were in shadows, but the [Green] Monster was lit, the field was lit and it was a walk-off hit. I liked the silhouette of the fans' arms going up, and you could see the players celebrating."

The Yankee Stadium shot she referenced probably was Pensinger's at the end of Game 1 in the 1998 World Series. Tino Martinez homered, and the photographer had ventured high into the stands, up against a shaking wall behind fans, positioned there because of required photographer rotation. He managed to capture a wide image that let celebrating fans in the foreground do the talking as much as the distant field depth. That one became a double truck (spanned two pages) in ESPN the Magazine. Pensinger has many photographic highlights, but to get a good understanding of the challenge baseball photographers face, let's look at last week.

At Rockies home games, there are three photographer spots behind home plate for the first inning only. They must be requested in advance. Pensinger had one of those spots last Wednesday for the game against Arizona. Joe Saunders was the starting pitcher for the D-backs, and after some patience by the photographer, the left-hander would become **the subject of compositional negative space**, framed by batter Carlos Gonzalez.

"It takes patience. It takes knowledge. The light has to be right," Pensinger said. "You can point your camera at second base and wait and eventually something is going to happen there. But it's all the rest of the time, trying to put elements in the picture and make things work when there's nobody on base. That takes a little bit of creativity. The willingness to get up and move around, to go to different places in the parks, when there are shadows on the field.

"I had the privilege of this access, as it kind of rotates through agencies or papers. The first inning can be absolutely nothing, three-up, three-down on both sides, with very little pitching. In this case, I got what I thought was a nice photo -- looking over the umpire's shoulder -- between the bat of the batter and over the shoulder of the catcher, and I could see the pitcher delivering with that little negative space.

"It took the right batter. The first two batters didn't work, Dexter Fowler or Mark Ellis. The third was CarGo. That's who it worked with. I got this little window when CarGo was at-bat, and every pitch I just kept trying, kept trying, kept trying. I think I got two pitches out of the at-bat that kind of worked."

Multitasking: How it works in the well

The photo well is on either side of the dugout, and life there is a constant dance between quality and urgency. In addition to the needs of deadline clients, there is an ongoing list of specific-subject request art, such as early-season action for trading card stock. The Getty images show up on the just-relaunched MLBPhotos.com, where you can sort by player, team, date and subject. MLB.com also builds custom photo galleries for every game, featuring shots not only from Getty, but also from The Associated Press as well as MLB and club photographers.

Getting the picture means one thing to a fan, it means quite another to the photographer. For Garrison, it means having a game plan and an efficient process for multitasking. Not to mention a good supply of Swedish Fish or Red Vines for the sugar rushes.

She said she mostly uses a 400mm 2.8 lens, "sometimes a 300, if I want a little wider picture, full-frame." Often she will have a 70-200mm zoom lens around her neck, perhaps for action at first base, anticipating someone diving back into the bag. She has a Dell laptop in the photo well, with Photoshop open, and two compact flash cards, so that one is always available to stick into her Canon while the other is in use as the laptop ingests, saving the picture and caption onto the hard drive.

Before each game, Garrison makes a rough photo template that says where and when the photo was shot. Her typical base caption is date, park and city. She has her roster and necessary key code info. Then, as the action is happening fast, the only thing she needs to caption a picture is name and play description. During a typical game, she will try to get a few pictures out in the first inning.

"To kind of keep a steady flow of pictures, I'm always kind of ingesting stuff into my computer," Garrison said. "If I feel I've gotten halfway through an inning, I'll stick my card into the computer and it will be ingesting, then I'll stick another card in my camera and then be ready for the next half inning.

"Then I'll pick the ones I think will be most newsworthy, or if we've had a request to send more pictures, I'll run it through Photoshop and do a quick crop. Once I save it, it goes back to the captioning software, then write the caption, hit send and it goes back to everyone."

Let's say it's a game right after the Trade Deadline, and a new starter is about to take the mound.

"I'll shoot a sequence of the pitcher throwing the first ball, and I'm just praying I don't miss a big hit if I do that," Garrison said. "I always shoot the first pitch of the first inning. I look at it in the back of the camera, see if I timed it right. Is the ball being released where I want it? Say I got them in the first three frames, then I will try to gingerly do my Photoshop work while still shooting. That's not the best dance, but you have to do it. I'll crop a picture and then wait for the next little break, maybe a meeting on the mound, then try to type in my caption.

"With digital and the fact we transmit from our positions, there's not really an excuse for missing anything. In the old days, you had to go back to the darkroom and soup your film. At the fastest, maybe I could get negatives dry and look at them in 15 minutes."

Thinking horizontal

Another of the notable changes in today's baseball photography, Pensinger said, is the predominance of horizontal focus. Credit the Internet for that. Just look on MLB.com and your favorite club site to understand why. Users scroll, so horizontal shots are considered best.

"With magazines, you used to think vertical. I'd think, 'Do I want the double truck inside the magazine or the cover?'" Pensinger said. "Now, with the dominance of the Internet, I think horizontal a lot more. When I see photo galleries on the Internet, they're all horizontal. ... Quite often, I'll send a picture that could be a vertical, but if I see it as horizontal, that's the way I'll send it."

Pensinger keeps his 24mm-105mm zoom around his neck or nearby "in the rare chance something happens near the photo well." And also for the occasional wide-angle view of the stands, fans or sunset. He uses a 300mm f/2.8 for action at the plate or second base, and a 500mm f/4 for isolated player action, including "top-half action of the pitcher."

He'll take that behind-home-plate spot like last Wednesday when he can get it. Default position is the first-base photo well, because "a great percentage of the defensive action is coming to first base. And the runner is coming from home plate toward you." Then he'll move on when he can. If it's a right-handed pitcher, he will move to third base and try to go through a cycle of the batting order, to be sure he gets all the left-handed batters face-on. Then, he will stop upstairs and "shoot a little bit of overhead," or maybe capture the shadows on the field.

"My personal perspective is, it's funny, with a lot of sports photographers, baseball gets a bad rap," said Pensinger, who shoots all sports, like Garrison. "Some say it's slow. I'm a big skier, cyclist, individual-sport guy. But the one organized sport I played as a kid was baseball -- through high school. I was a catcher. I've just got a better appreciation, a better knowledge of the game. Unlike a sport like soccer or basketball, where it's constant movement, or a smaller court, a lot of time things aren't going on, but you have to be aware. You have to be able to predict what's going to happen, and in the quiet time use the lights and shadows."

Angels beat A's 4-1

Associated Press

OAKLAND — Jered Weaver shrugged off his career-best 17th win of the season as if it were his first.

With his team locked in a tight race with AL West-leading Texas, the Los Angeles Angels ace will have plenty of time to relish his achievements in the offseason. Weaver may also have to come back on three days' rest for his next start, so any individual celebration will have to wait.

"We haven't gotten to our goal yet, but from a personal standpoint it's pretty cool," Weaver said after pitching seven innings in a 4-1 win over the Oakland Athletics on Wednesday. "It's not over yet. We still have a lot of goals to accomplish as a team, which is more important. Hopefully we keep winning some ballgames."

Los Angeles will have to do just that to maintain its playoff hopes.

The Angels began the day three games behind Texas with two weeks remaining. The Rangers were scheduled to host Cleveland at night.

That's one of the reasons manager Mike Scioscia is considering juggling his rotation to get Weaver (17-7) back on the mound, possibly as soon as Sunday in Baltimore.

"I'm good with it," Weaver said. "We've got a tight one going on right now and anything we can do to help the club win some ballgames, I'm all for it. I feel great."

Mark Trumbo hit a tiebreaking homer in the sixth and Bobby Abreu added two hits and scored twice for the Angels, who took the series after losing the opener.

Josh Willingham matched his career high of 26 home runs with a solo shot off Weaver in the third but the A's managed only two baserunners over the final six innings.

Oakland, which has been held to one run or fewer 30 times this season, committed two errors to add to its AL-leading total of 119.

"That's been the biggest weakness in the club this year," manager Bob Melvin said. "In theory, next spring, that will be the No. 1 priority."

Oakland may also want to work on its hitting after putting only two runners on base over the final six innings.

Weaver allowed six hits with one walk and two strikeouts. He pitched out of a bases-loaded situation in the first and escaped a two-on, one-out jam in the second to beat the A's for the third time in four starts this season.

That lowered the lanky right-hander's ERA to 2.40, second in the AL behind Detroit ace Justin Verlander (2.36). Weaver also improved to 13-0 this year when going at least seven innings.

That's been big for the Angels, who are 21-10 in games Weaver starts and 61-57 otherwise.

"It was a rocky start for Weave," Scioscia said. "It looked like he was struggling to get his pitches into good zones. He loosened up as the game went on. It was a day where he didn't have his best stuff but pitched with it."

It also marked Los Angeles' second straight win in Oakland after losing 10 of its previous 12 at the Coliseum.

Scott Downs pitched a scoreless eighth and Jordan Walden worked the ninth for his 31st save, extending his Angels rookie record.

The A's, who still lead the season series 9-7, had Weaver in trouble early but couldn't deliver with runners on base.

Willingham drove in the A's only run when he hit a 2-2 pitch over the wall in left-center. That tied his career high set in 2006 with Florida.

Oakland's defense made several nice plays to help preserve the 1-0 lead until Los Angeles broke through in the sixth.

Howie Kendrick, who hit a pair of two-run homers in Tuesday's 6-3 win, drew a leadoff walk and scored from first on Abreu's double to right-center. Two batters later, Trumbo hit his 26th home run of the season to make it 3-1.

Rich Harden (4-3) didn't make it out of the sixth, allowing three runs and seven hits. Since throwing seven scoreless innings against Toronto on Aug. 19, the Oakland right-hander is winless in four starts and has a 6.97 ERA during that span.

Trumbo also hit a hard single off the wall in the eighth. He needs three home runs over the final 13 games to become the second rookie in Angels history to have at least 30 home runs and 80 RBIs. Tim Salmon had 31 home runs and 95 RBIs in 1993.

"He's going to have to get a lot of Rookie of the Year consideration just because of the numbers," Scioscia said. "And if we reach our goal, there's no doubt he has to get some MVP consideration. If you take him out of our lineup this year, we're not even talking about a pennant race."

Abreu, who led off the eighth with a walk, scored an insurance run when Trumbo stole second base and Oakland infielder Eric Sogard bobbled the throw from catcher Kurt Suzuki.

NOTES: A's CF Ryan Sweeney strained his quadriceps while running out a grounder in the sixth. ... Coco Crisp (foot) hit in the cage and might return to Oakland's lineup Thursday. ... Angels RHP Dan Haren, who tossed a shutout in his last start, pitches in the series opener Friday night against Baltimore. Haren (15-8) can match his career high for wins by beating the Orioles. ... Brandon McCarthy, who starts Thursday for Oakland against Detroit, is holding opponents to a .196 batting average over his past four outings.

For A's, a way to San Jose?

Buster Olney, espn.com, 9/15/2011

The [Oakland Athletics](#) are a rotting franchise, entrenched in intransigence, so for the folks who work in the team's front office, [Mark Purdy's story](#) that Bill Neukom has been forced out as the managing general partner of the Giants was almost certainly taken as a glimpse of an oasis.

It's possible, of course, that this is just a mirage. Larry Baer, who is replacing Neukom, could adopt Neukom's hard line as his own, at the urging of the Giants' ocean of owners. But, as Purdy writes within his story:

The Giants' stance regarding territorial rights to the South Bay is also not likely to change because Baer has been at the forefront of trying to keep the A's from pursuing a new ballpark in San Jose.

Major League Baseball, however, must approve the Giants' ownership moves and the A's issue could be part of that dialogue.

And Major League Baseball is desperate for a solution, 30 months since a committee was formed to study Oakland's ballpark situation. The committee has taken about 500 more days -- and counting -- than the Warren Commission did in generating a resolution.

A longtime agent once offered this advice about dealing with MLB: Just threaten to sue on anti-trust grounds and you'll get what you want. Neukom is an accomplished lawyer with a long history of court battles, and if MLB had tried to shove Oakland's move to San Jose down the throat of the Giants -- who possess territorial rights to San Jose -- then Neukom could

have reacted with a lawsuit. The perception in some front offices is that Major League Baseball, which is already dealing with organization brush fires with the Dodgers, Mets and Rays, did not want to pick a legal fight with Neukom. Not now, anyway.

C.J. Wilson recently noted, free agents don't have much interest in signing with Oakland.

Time and again, the Athletics have thought that a solution for their situation has been imminent, and over and over, those hopes have been crushed by inaction. There is almost nothing sturdy for the Athletics to hang on to now, as they look ahead. They have one of the lowest payrolls in the majors, they spent the fewest dollars on draft picks of any team, and elite free agents really have no interest in signing with Oakland, as [C.J. Wilson](#) demonstrated. On the days after the Raiders play their home games, the smell of sewage wafts through the Oakland clubhouse.

Owner Lew Wolff wants change. He wants to build a ballpark in San Jose, but he has no idea whether that's even possible yet, given the territorial-rights issue.

So yes, the report of Neukom's departure was probably devoured in the Athletics' hierarchy the way a hungry dog inhales a piece of hamburger. They need something to feed on these days -- anything.

The fact that Neukom didn't communicate with the executive committee of Giants ownership about payroll was a problem, writes [Henry Schulman](#). [Tim Kawakami](#) wonders what this means for the Giants' future.

Notables

- The Phillies clinched a playoff spot and reacted like they were emptying the dishwasher -- just taking care of business, just doing another chore, which fits the work ethic and personality of [Roy Halladay](#).

From David Murphy's story:

"I think that's what it is, is it's become a mind-set for us," said [Ryan Howard](#), one of eight current Phillies who were there at this time in 2007 when the playoffs seemed a near-impossibility. "We've been to the top of the mountain, reached the pinnacle so to speak, and we know what that tastes like. It's kind of like anything less is just that."

From ESPN Stats & Info, how Halladay shut out the Astros:

A) He kept the ball down in the zone with success. Astros hitters were 0-for-17 with five strikeouts in at-bats ending with a low pitch from Halladay. Sixty-four of Halladay's 114 pitches (56.1 percent) were down in the zone or below it, above his 45.9 percent season average.

B) Halladay threw 17 changeups, 16 of which went for strikes (94.1 percent), his highest percentage in the last three seasons in a start with more 10 changeups. Halladay threw 11 changeups out of the strike zone, and the Astros chased 10 of them. Houston hitters were 1-for-8 with three strikeouts in at-bats ending with a Halladay changeup.

C) Eighty-six of Halladay's 114 pitches (75.4 percent) went for strikes, his highest percentage of the season. He was helped in large part by the Astros' aggressiveness. Houston hitters chased 26 of Halladay's 53 pitches thrown out of the strike zone (49.1 percent), matching the high against Halladay this season.

D) In particular, Halladay's off-speed pitches had the Astros fooled. Halladay threw 26 off-speed pitches out of the strike zone, and the Astros chased 19 of them (73.1 percent). That's the highest chase percentage against any starter's off-speed pitches this year in a start with more than 30 off-speed pitches. Astros hitters were 3-for-18 with six strikeouts in at-bats ending with a Halladay off-speed pitch. Halladay's 15 outs with his off-speed pitches are his most in a start in the last three seasons.

Most career shutouts among active pitchers:

Roy Halladay -- 20
[Chris Carpenter](#) -- 14
[Tim Hudson](#) -- 12
[CC Sabathia](#) -- 12

A quick look at Halladay's ranks among active pitchers:

Wins -- 2nd
Complete games -- 1st
Shutouts -- 1st
Strikeouts -- 6th

Halladay threw his 20th career shutout. Since MLB expanded the postseason to include a wild-card team in each league in 1994, Halladay is one of three pitchers with at least 20 shutouts.

Race for the NL No. 2 seed: All in all, it was not the best of days for the Brewers, who were flat in a loss to the Rockies and heard again that Prince Fielder is probably leaving.

Fielder really is just stating the obvious at this point. On the other hand, the timing of Francisco Rodriguez's complaints about his role are very strange, considering that the Brewers are having success and closer John Axford has been excellent this season and that Rodriguez is just nine weeks away from becoming a free agent. Rodriguez has gone along with this situation for the last couple of months, so why whine now?

The Diamondbacks lost; also, Gerardo Parra was hit by a Clayton Kershaw pitch, apparently for past transgressions.

AL wild card: The Rays are running out of days, and they missed a tremendous opportunity to gain ground, losing in Baltimore after the Red Sox had blown a lead to the Jays. Matt Moore had a rocky debut, as Marc Topkin writes.

Sam Fuld may miss some time because of a wrist injury, as Roger Mooney writes.

The time has come for the Red Sox to win games, not point fingers, writes Michael Silverman.

High speed

A month-to-month comparison of the velocities of Jonny Venters and Daniel Bard.

Month	Venters	Bard
April 2010	93.4	97.6
May 2010	94.1	97.6
June 2010	94.2	98.3
July 2010	94.6	97.7
August 2010	95.1	97.2
Sept/Oct 2010	94.8	98.0
March/April 2011	93.9	96.6
May 2011	94.6	97.2
June 2011	94.6	97.6
July 2011	95.7	97.7
August 2011	95.7	97.7
Sept 2011	94.8	96.2

Daniel Bard has had a difficult month, and his month-to-month fastball velocity is a symptom of a problem, whether it's mechanical inconsistency or just plain weariness. It's not unusual for relievers to wear down, no matter how dominant. From Daniel Braunstein of ESPN Stats & Info, in the chart to the right, the month-to-month velocity readings for two of the sport's most dominant set-up men, Bard and Atlanta's Jonny Venters.

AL West: Josh Hamilton and the Rangers have been killing the ball against the Indians. Michael Young is closing in on his sixth 200-hit season, as Drew Davison writes.

Jered Weaver won, with slower stuff. From ESPN Stats & Info: Weaver's fastball averaged 87.1 mph on Wednesday -- his slowest average fastball this season. He had just one strikeout in the start. His reduced fastball velocity may be a potential concern as the Angels think about starting him Sunday on three days' rest. Weaver's fastball velocity has been on a steady decline over the course of the season.

By the way: The Angels' best hope for making the playoffs may actually be as a wild card.

No. 1 seed in AL: The Tigers gained a game on the Yankees in the standings, after extending their winning streak to 12 games, and after the Yankees lost in extra innings.

The at-bats the Detroit hitters are throwing out these days are exceptional; every hitter, it seems, is taking the ball through the middle or the opposite field, which is what Victor Martinez and Carlos Guillen did in extra innings Wednesday.

FROM ELIAS: The Tigers have won 12 straight games, and all have come against AL Central opponents. Since MLB went to divisional play in 1969, Detroit's streak is tied with the 2004 Astros for the second-longest win streak by a team that featured all of its wins against divisional foes, one behind the 13-game streak set by the 1982 Braves.

NL wild card: Atlanta's situation has stabilized, after victories the last couple of days, getting a big home run from Alex Gonzalez. The Braves need Tommy Hanson back, writes Mark Bradley.

The Cardinals won, but they will have to play without Matt Holliday in the upcoming series against the Phillies. Watched the end of St. Louis' win over Pittsburgh, and Jason Motte was ridiculous. Consider his second-half numbers: 28 innings, 13 hits, opponents' BA: .141, one earned run, three walks and 21 strikeouts.

- There seem to be all kinds of messages coming from Ozzie Guillen, like warning shots. He's made it clear that he'd like an extension, and that if he doesn't get it, he wants out -- and now he's saying he wouldn't rip the White Sox on the way out the door. And at the same time, he's reminded everybody that he's capable of taking his shots, with his criticism of unnamed players after their latest loss.

From Mark Gonzales' story:

"Hell no," Guillen said when asked if he still saw his team battling. "Their fight left three days ago. I don't care what they say. We have coaches. We're still out there and hopefully win some games."

In recent days, Guillen has been more vocally protective of his coaches and pointed out they still have some financial rewards at stake. The average full-share for each member of a second-place team is about \$10,000 and the Sox are battling the Indians for that.

"You know what's funny?" Guillen said. "Some coaches might need the \$5,000, \$3,000 (extra) to be in second place. ... They can buy Christmas gifts for their kids."

"Maybe the players don't need that, but some coaches do. Just think about them and make sure we win second place."

"But the fight? No, I don't see it."

Moves, deals and decisions

1. The Reds' owner intends to bring back his general manager and manager. The Reds ought to share their plans with fans, writes Paul Daugherty.
2. The Indians' Mark Shapiro hasn't had contact with the Cubs, writes Paul Hoynes.
3. Another Cubs executive is set to speak with the team's ownership about an extension.
4. The Athletics have choices to make about their own free agents, writes Susan Slusser.
5. Brian Matusz could pitch again this year.
6. An incident on the team plane led to Mike Cameron's release, writes Joe Capozzi.
7. The Pirates picked up a catcher.
8. The Yankees are selling their Staten Island affiliate.

Dings and dents

1. Johnny Cueto is hurt, and this might cost him his ERA title.
2. Johan Santana won't pitch for the Mets this year.
3. Joe Blanton returned to action this week.
4. Ryan Sweeney got hurt.

5. Buster Posey continues to make progress.

Wednesday's games

1. Clayton Kershaw is really as nice as advertised, personable and funny and sincere. And nobody should ever assume that any of that will prevent him from doing what he thinks he needs to do on behalf of teammates, like drill Gerardo Parra. He is very similar to CC Sabathia, in all of that; Kershaw had yelled at Parra the night before.

2. The Orioles were homer-happy in playing the role of spoiler, as Peter Schmuck writes.

3. Kevin Millwood threw well again for the Rockies, as Jim Armstrong writes.

4. Brad Peacock won in his first major league start.

5. The Mariners threw out a bunch of different relievers.

6. Carlos Beltran hit his 300th homer. Tim Lincecum liked the young catcher he worked with. From ESPN Stats & Info, how Lincecum won:

A) Lincecum threw his fastball just 34 percent of the time (34 of 100 pitches), his lowest percentage since June 2, 2009. His average fastball velocity of 90.8 mph was his second-lowest of the season.

B) Five of Lincecum's six strikeouts came against the three left-handed hitters in the Padres' lineup. He threw 40 pitches to lefties, and 23 of those pitches were changeups (57.5 percent). It was his first start in the last three seasons in which over 50 percent of his pitches to lefties were changeups. Six of the Padres' lefties' nine plate appearances against Lincecum ended with changeups, including three strikeouts.

7. David Huff and the Indians got hammered.

Bad company

Most consecutive losing seasons in each of the four major sports.

Sport	Team	Seasons	Years
MLB	Pirates	19	1993-2011
NBA	Kings	15	1983-1997
NHL	Canucks	15	1976-1990
NFL	Bucs	14	1983-1996

8. The Pirates lost, clinching another losing season. From ESPN Stats & Info: That makes 19 straight losing seasons, the longest streak all-time in the four major pro sports. No other pro team has had a streak longer than 16.

9. Adam Loewen was The Man for the Jays.

10. The Twins have been lousy on defense this year, and that continued against the Royals.

11. That's four straight wins and counting for the Royals. Luke Hochevar feels like he's putting it all together.

12. The Padres were swept, as Bill Center writes.

13. The Mets were eliminated, as Mark Viera writes.

The Patience Index

Sit back and wait

These hitters saw the most pitches per plate appearance on Wednesday (minimum 3 PA).

Player	Pitches	PA	P per PA
Matt Dominguez, FLA	21	3	7.00

Player	Pitches	PA	P per PA
Ryan Sweeney, OAK	19	3	6.33
Johnny Damon, TB	25	4	6.25
Hideki Matsui, OAK	25	4	6.25
Shelley Duncan, CLE	25	4	6.25
Jason Bay, NYM	24	4	6.00
Seth Smith, COL	24	4	6.00
All of MLB, Wednesday	4104	1090	3.77

Other stuff

- The McCourts' divorce trial may not happen until next year, [writes Bill Shaikin](#).
- The Rockies have an interesting problem with their Triple-A affiliate, [as Dave Krieger writes](#).
- The Nationals could finish third, and [Thomas Boswell believes](#) this would be a good step.
- Mike Quade has a to-do list for his players, [as Fred Mitchell writes](#).
- The Jays' rookies got a kick out of being hazed, [as Richard Griffin writes](#).
- The Astros [released their schedule](#).
- Rich Dube is in the most demanding job in sports, [writes Bill Conlin](#).
- [Justin Verlander](#) has been working on becoming more consistent, [as John Lowe writes](#).
- A catcher became the [first player suspended](#) for 100 games.

And today will be better than yesterday.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

River Cats return home facing elimination

Sacramento River Cats

Raley Field magic will be needed again.

The Omaha Storm Chasers took a 2-games-to-0 series lead over visiting Sacramento on Wednesday night with a convincing 15-4 victory in Game 2 of the Pacific Coast League Championship Series.

Omaha used a five-run third inning, aided by one of two Sacramento errors, to take the lead and tacked on eight more runs in the final three innings.

"The defense let us down today," said Sacramento third baseman Josh Donaldson. "(Sacramento starter Tyson Ross) was actually making some good pitches. The defense has been there all year long, this is one of the few times where it's bit us."

The River Cats will need to win games 3, 4 and 5 from Friday through Sunday at Raley Field to win their fifth PCL championship in franchise history. Sacramento faced the same 2-games-to-0 deficit in the first round against Reno before winning three in a row before the hometown fans.

Sacramento's offense struck first when Jermaine Mitchell opened the game with a single and Wes Timmons walked. After a wild pitch, Chris Carter hit a sacrifice fly to the center-field wall to score Mitchell. Adrian Cardenas then gave Sacramento a 3-0 lead with a two-run home run down the right-field line.

From that point on, Omaha outscored Sacramento 15-1. The Storm Chasers scored single runs in the first and second innings before breaking the game open in the third. Lead-off hitter Jarrod Dyson led the Omaha offense, going 4-for-6 with a home run, three runs and four RBIs.

Ross allowed seven runs (four earned) over 2.2 innings, giving up nine hits, striking out three and walking one. Omaha starter Vin Mazzaro allowed three runs over 5.0 innings and took the victory.

Sacramento is 0-4 on the road in the playoffs.