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Mariners.com

Mariners dig early hole, fall to Athletics

By Jim Street / MLB.com

Struggling Vargas unable to notch 10th win

OAKLAND -- The breakout season left-hander Jason Vargas was enjoying when he reached the middle of August has run smack into a brick wall.

After beating the Indians on Aug. 14, Vargas was on the verge of becoming a double-digit winner for the first time in his seven-year professional career. But he has lost all four of his starts since then, and it has been a continuing theme: fall behind early and stay behind.

The Athletics greeted Vargas with two runs in the first inning on Monday afternoon, tacked on three more in the fourth, and saddled the lefty with his ninth loss as the Mariners labored through a 6-2 loss before 11,581 at the Coliseum.

It marked the fourth consecutive start where Vargas surrendered at least one run in the first inning -- eight runs in all. With the way the Mariners have struggled to score, it explains why he went into his 27th start on a season-high three-game losing streak.

Center fielder Franklin Gutierrez, who returned to the lineup after missing two games because of the flu, provided the Mariners with their first a run -- a leadoff home run in the seventh inning off Oakland starter Brett Anderson -- and set up the second with a ninth-inning double.

It was too little, too late for the Mariners' offense.

For Vargas, it has been too much, too soon.

"I don't know," he said when asked about the run of tough first innings. "There have been stretches when it hasn't happened and stretches when it has happened. I mean, I guess I really don't have an answer for that."

The left-hander's second pitch of the game, to Coco Crisp, was hit high and deep to left-center, disappearing over the fence between the 362- and 388-foot signs.

It was Crisp's first first-inning home run since Aug. 18, 2003, against the Rays, the first by the Athletics this season and the second time it has happened to Vargas this season -- Rickie Weeks on June 27 at Milwaukee -- and fourth in his career.

"You really don't expect Coco Crisp to hit one out of the yard on a fastball that was up and away," Vargas said. "You don't expect him to drive that pitch out of the yard. I mean, I can't chalk that up to anything except bad luck."

Daric Barton hit Vargas' next pitch off the wall in right field, ending up with his fifth triple of the season. The drive first fooled Ichiro Suzuki and then caromed off his foot, allowing the Oakland first baseman to reach third.

He scored on an infield out.

"I know there are times when some pitchers have trouble in the first inning," interim manager Daren Brown said. "But look at the pitches. The first pitch was up and the guy hit it out. Barton usually is a patient guy and he hit the first pitch for a triple off the wall.

"Two hitters into the game and [Vargas] is close to being down 2-0," Brown added. "But I thought he battled. He gave us what he had, but wasn't as sharp as he was before."

Vargas was replaced with one out in the fifth inning when he reached the 81-pitch mark.

"I know he says he feels good, but this is the most innings [169 1/3] he has pitched in his career," Brown said. "We know that, and it worked into the decision today to take him out after 80 pitches.

"I don't think he's as sharp as he had been. Eighty pitches in four innings for a guy who's a command guy is a lot -- and I thought he had to work today to keep it where it was."

With an off-day on Thursday, the entire rotation will get an extra day between starts.

"If he gets an extra day of rest, maybe that will help," Brown added.

No one is sure what will help the Mariners' woeful offense, which has produced three or fewer runs in 11 consecutive games.

They threatened in the second inning, when Russell Branyan was hit by a pitch and Jose Lopez singled to center with nobody out. But Casey Kotchman grounded into a double play and catcher Adam Moore took a called third strike.

"We're just not getting the big hit, the kind that will put pressure on the pitcher," hitting coach Alonzo Powell said. "Unfortunately, we're not getting that."

Brett Anderson took the game into the eighth inning, holding the Mariners to two hits through six innings before Gutierrez hit his 11th home run of the season leading off the seventh.

"Anderson did a nice job," Brown said. "We know what he can do. He has shown before what he can do. I thought he commanded the fastball pretty good, the slider, changeup at times, and he put a few curveballs in there.

"Overall, we didn't do much against him."

That was apparent from both dugouts.

"The way he's been throwing, he didn't need too many runs," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "Anytime you give a guy a little cushion, it lets him stay aggressive and not worry about a solo home run changing the game."

Gutierrez had two of the Mariners' five hits and Ichiro had one, his 179th of the season.

But none of the hits did much to cut into a deficit that reached five runs after Oakland scored three times off Vargas in the fourth.

Athletics right fielder Matt Carson, batting .167 with one home run coming into the series opener, hit a 1-and-0 pitch over the fence in left-center -- the exact same spot Crisp's home run went.

One of the other two runs in the frame resulted from bad luck.

Jack Cust hit a ball that Mariners left fielder Michael Saunders lost in the sun and the ball dropped for a double. After a sacrifice bunt advanced Cust to third, Crisp singled past drawn-in shortstop Josh Wilson.

"They hit some balls hard, hit some balls out of the yard, and led off some innings with doubles," Vargas said. "I guess the rest is history."

The question now becomes: Can the lefty finally capture his 10th victory?

09/06/10

Felix: Performance is my campaign

By Jim Street / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The only way right-hander Felix Hernandez will "campaign" for the American League Cy Young Award is to, "keep pitching the way I have and see what happens at the end of the season."

This is the year of the pitcher in the Major Leagues and the Mariners' ace stands out.

He extended his scoreless streak to 16 1/3 innings on Sunday afternoon in Seattle and has surrendered one earned run since Aug. 5 -- seven starts and 43 innings ago.

His name should be near the top among the elite hurlers in the American League.

But his 11-10 record could doom his chances of copping the AL Cy Young Award.

His prime competition probably would come from Yankees left-hander CC Sabathia, a sure-fire 20-game winner, and Red Sox right-hander Clay Buchholz.

But Felix leads everyone in almost every category.

"It's not my decision," Hernandez said on Monday. "That's up to you guys [writers]."

Almost everything about Felix's pitching this season has been better than a year ago, when he won 19 games and finished second to Royals right-hander Zack Greinke in the AL Cy Young Award voting.

He is on pace to establish career highs in most categories, including innings pitched, ERA, strikeouts, complete games, and quality starts.

As for winning his first Cy Young Award and becoming the second pitcher in franchise history to land the award -- Randy Johnson won in 1995 -- he's not losing any sleep over it.

"Any pitcher wants to win the Cy Young Award, but I would rather pitch in the playoffs and World Series," he said. "That's number one."

Has he pitched better this season than last season?

"Other than wins, I have better numbers in other categories," he said. "But that's baseball. I know these guys are trying hard. My teammates are trying to score runs."

Meanwhile, he's trying just as hard to keep the other team from scoring runs -- and succeeding.

"I've been pitching pretty good," he smiled. "Pretty good."

Ya think?

Gutierrez returns to lineup

OAKLAND -- After feeling under the weather for several days, center fielder Franklin Gutierrez returned to the Mariners lineup on Monday afternoon.

"He feels a lot better," interim manager Daren Brown said. "He looks a lot better. You can tell by his face that he's a lot better. He looks more like himself and he has a little more spring in his step. It's good to have him patrolling center field today."

The flu bug ran through Gutierrez's family several days ago and he caught it, forcing him to miss the final two games of the four-game series against the Indians.

With three left-handers scheduled to face the Mariners in the series against the Athletics, Brown said it was important to have Gutierrez in the lineup.

"Obviously, he's [an offensive] threat," Brown said.

Like virtually every other hitter on the team this season, the 27-year-old is having a worse season than he did in 2009, when he batted .283 with 18 home runs and 70 RBIs.

With 25 games remaining, he's batting .250 with 10 home runs and 53 RBIs.

"Is he as good as he was last year?" Brown asked. "The stats say, 'no,' but for me, it's hard to believe he's not the same hitter he was last year.

"When a guy shows you what he can do, whether he has a down year or not, you know what they are capable of doing. He's going to get better."

Brown sends kudos to the Rainiers

SEATTLE -- Interim manager Daren Brown went on a text-messaging binge on Sunday and early Monday, sending and receiving messages from his former team, the Pacific Coast League North Division champion Tacoma Rainiers -- the team he managed through Aug. 8.

The Rainiers clinched their second consecutive division title on Sunday.

"I'm really happy for those guys," Brown said. "I heard that [Tacoma] hadn't won back-to-back titles in 30 years, so it's not an easy thing to do."

It was the first time since 1981-82 that the Rainiers won back-to-back division titles.

Brown pointed out that the team he managed all of last season clinched on the final day of the regular season, while this year's team nailed down a playoff spot on the next-to-last day.

"It's a difficult thing for a Triple-A team to do because guys come and go," Brown said. "I'm happy for a young group of kids that were able to celebrate on the field."

Brayan's power key vs. Athletics

By Doug Miller / MLB.com

The Mariners have been looking for offense in a big way this year, and they've been getting it from a familiar source of late. Meanwhile, the A's are making the most of their third-base situation with their regular guy a bit banged up. That's the story when the two American League West teams go at each other on Tuesday night in the second of a three-game series in Oakland.

For the Mariners, first baseman Russell Branyan has been every bit the beast of a long-ball threat that he was for them last year before he signed with Cleveland in the offseason.

Since being re-acquired from the Indians on June 26, Branyan has hit 13 home runs in the 43 games he's played -- more than anyone else on the team has hit all year -- and ranks second in franchise history in home runs per at-bat with a minimum of 700 plate appearances.

Branyan has hit 44 home runs in 164 games with Seattle over the past two seasons, one every 13.66 at-bats. Only Ken Phelps (13.32) hit home runs more often than Branyan has. Ken Griffey Jr. is third on the list with a home run every 15.15 at-bats.

For the A's, with regular third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff listed as day-to-day with lower back pain, manager Bob Geren said he'll likely platoon Jeff Larish and Steve Tolleson at third base, giving Oakland yet another look in a season in which they've explored various combinations in the infield.

"Kouz had been swinging the bat well the last 10 days, so there's a little void," Geren said. "But that's a situation where a guy has a chance to fill in and do a nice job."

Mariners: Fister looking for consistency

Righty Doug Fister, who starts Tuesday's game, had an uneven outing in his last start. On Sept. 2 vs. Cleveland in Seattle, he allowed only one hit in his first five innings and retired 14 batters in a row. But he gave up four runs in the sixth to erase a 3-0 lead. He's 3-1, with a 1.50 ERA in five career starts vs. the A's, including a 2-1 record and 1.50 ERA in three starts against Oakland this season. ... The Mariners' Triple-A Tacoma affiliate and Class A Clinton club both clinched playoff spots yesterday. That means eight of the Mariners' nine Minor League affiliates, including the Dominican and Venezuelan Mariners, have advanced to the postseason this year.

A's: Braden continues to impress

Tuesday's starter Dallas Braden is tied for the American League lead in shutouts (two), tied for third in complete games (three), ranks fourth in fewest walks per nine innings (1.73), and is ninth in ERA (3.23). He's 5-3 with a 2.32 ERA in nine starts since being reinstated from the disabled list on July 20. He's 2-1 with a 4.05 ERA in six career appearances (five starts) against Seattle. ... The A's optioned starter Vin Mazzaro to Triple-A Sacramento on Monday after a stretch in which the young righty went 0-6 with a 5.60 ERA and a .284 opponents' batting average in his past eight starts. Mazzaro is 6-8 with a 4.29 ERA in 21 games (18 starts) over two stints with Oakland.

Worth noting

The Mariners have scored three runs or less in 11 consecutive games (4-7). They scored four runs in the second game of a doubleheader in Boston on Aug. 25, which was the only time in its past 14 games the team reached four runs. ... The A's are batting .229 (169-for-739) with 90 runs scored over their last 23 games (3.91 runs per game). They've scored 555 for the season, which is fourth-fewest in the American League.

Seattle Times

Monday, September 6, 2010

Jason Vargas hit hard early in 6-2 Mariners loss to A's

By Geoff Baker

Jason Vargas's first three pitches resulted in a home run and triple as Oakland beat the Seattle Mariners.

Seattle Times staff reporter

OAKLAND, Calif. — Three pitches in, it was obvious Jason Vargas and the Mariners were in for a long day.

In actuality, the two-hour, 19-minute holiday yawner, which the Mariners lost 6-2 to the Oakland Athletics, seemed a whole lot longer than it really was. But with Seattle's offense clunking along at record-low pace, the Monday matinee was effectively done on a first-inning home run by Coco Crisp and an ensuing triple by Daric Barton on the very next pitch.

Barton scored moments later and the Mariners never showed signs of getting back into it. And now, with Vargas's earned-run average and home run totals shooting up in his past few outings, the inevitable questions about whether he's wearing down have surfaced once more.

"If you go by his career, the number of innings he's pitched, this is the most he's been," Mariners manager Daren Brown said. "We know that. That works into the decision today of (limiting him to) 80 pitches. I don't think he's as sharp as he has been. And 80 pitches in four innings for a guy that's a command guy, obviously he's not getting through easy innings.

"I thought he had to work today to keep it where it was. And it is something we'll look at."

Brown backed that up moments later by announcing that the rotation will stay on course after Thursday's off-day. That means Vargas will pitch Sunday's road trip finale in Anaheim on an extra day's rest.

Franklin Gutierrez hit a solo home run in the seventh with his team down 5-0, but the Mariners' offense managed just four hits off A's starter Brett Anderson for 7-2/3 innings, and one more against the Oakland bullpen. The Mariners have scored three runs or fewer in 11 consecutive games and will match the club record set in 1988 if they do it one more time.

"We're not finding that big hit," hitting coach Alonzo Powell said, adding that the Mariners hit the ball hard early, "but again, we couldn't get anything going."

For the record, Vargas threw 81 pitches over 4-1/3 innings in front of an announced crowd of 11,581 at the Coliseum that appeared to be about half that size. Most of his pitches were up in the zone, especially early on. Crisp launched the second pitch from Vargas over the wall in left-center.

The day's third pitch from Vargas was jack-hammered by Barton off the wall in right field, tying Ichiro in knots as he tried to get to it.

"They hit some balls hard, hit some balls out of the yard and led off some innings with some doubles," Vargas said. "I guess the rest is history."

Oakland's Matt Carson, who'd made a spectacular diving catch in foul territory down the right-field line in the first inning, led off the fourth with a solo homer. Jack Cust doubled to lead off the fifth and later scored to make it 5-0 in Vargas's final frame.

Vargas was at a loss to explain what had transpired. Nor could he say why he's now allowed first-inning runs in each of his last four outings.

"You're really not expecting Coco Crisp to hit one out of the yard on a fastball," he said. "I mean, it was up, but it was away. You just don't expect him to drive that pitch out of the yard the second pitch of the game. So, I really can't chalk that up to anything but bad luck."

But it may not all be bad luck. Vargas has thrown 169-1/3 innings this season, nearly 80 more than his previous high in the majors. That total is also just 12-1/3 innings beyond his all-time high as a professional pitcher five years ago.

He's lost four straight outings with a 7.23 ERA and four home runs allowed over that stretch. Before that, he'd allowed just 14 homers in 22 starts with an ERA of 3.15.

The home run troubles didn't just begin recently. In fact, 10 have come since the All-Star break, compared to eight in the three previous months.

Vargas said he's sensed hitters becoming more patient with him and making him throw more fastballs his last seven or eight outings.

"I think everybody gets to see everybody more and more, and what they do and don't do," he said. "You've just got to expect that. You've got to make adjustments."

Vargas is right about that. Whether it's coming up with new ways to retire hitters with a better book on him, or additional rest for a weary arm, adjustments appear needed to get Vargas through the final three weeks.

Everett wins NWL playoff opener over Vancouver; Tacoma closes with loss

VANCOUVER, B.C. — The Everett AquaSox scored four runs in the top of the 10th inning, after failing to hold a two-run, ninth-inning lead, for a 9-5 victory over the Vancouver in Game 1 of the Northwest League Western Division playoffs Monday.

Game 2 is Tuesday night in Everett.

Eric Valdez earned the win for the AquaSox, even after giving up the tying two-run homer with two outs in the bottom of the ninth. Valdez bounced back to set the Canadians down in order in the 10th.

Fresno downs Tacoma in finale

Jesus Guzman was 4 for 5 with a triple, double and three runs batted in as the Fresno Grizzlies earned a 9-6 victory over the Tacoma Rainiers in a Pacific Coast League regular-season finale Monday.

Tacoma, which begins the PCL playoffs Wednesday at Sacramento, got a three-run homer from Justin Smoak and solo homers from Dustin Ackley and Brad Nelson.

Tacoma plays Game 3 of the Sacramento series at Safeco Field because of renovations to Cheney Stadium.

Jason Vargas looking like he's been through a long season

Posted by Geoff Baker

Jason Vargas has done more than most people, myself included, thought he would this year. But now, after 169 1/3 innings pitched, it looks like some of it is catching up to him.

Part of that might be the workload, which is almost 80 more innings and counting than Vargas threw last year in establishing his major league high. And while he's still a dozen innings shy of his all-time professional mark, set in 2005, most of that came in the minor leagues. Any pitcher will tell you the wear and tear on your arm is more severe in the majors than below. That's because each pitch up here has to be a guy's all-out best -- with more rotation needed on the ball than at AA or AAA -- or it will get hammered.

So, it's hardly a shock that manager Daren Brown chose after today's game to keep his rotation in alignment after Thursday's day off. That leaves an extra day of rest for Vargas to work Sunday's finale in Anaheim.

Brown talked after this game of monitoring Vargas's arm.

"It is something we'll look at," he said.

In fact, it's a big reason Brown pulled Vargas after only 4 1/3 innings today. Vargas was at 81 pitches already and Brown wanted to watch that.

It was also the way those pitches were being hammered that were of concern.

There were two home runs, a triple, two doubles and even some pretty long outs. It was after a flyout to left that was so deep the runner advanced from second to third on the play that Brown pulled his pitcher.

Vargas had a sense it wouldn't be his day.

"You're really not expecting Coco Crisp to hit one out of the yard on a fastball," he said of the leadoff, first inning blast. "I mean, it was up but it was away. You just don't expect him to drive that pitch out of the yard the second pitch of the game. So, I really can't chalk that up to anything but bad luck."

Yes, but the ensuing Daric Barton triple was hit just as hard. Vargas acknowledged he gave up a few too many extra-base hits early on.

He also said he'd sensed hitters being a lot more patient with him the last seven or eight outings. As a result, he's had to throw his fastball more to get strikes early in the count. Those fastballs can get hit if opponents sense they're coming. After all, Vargas is not Randy Johnson.

Vargas's words got me thinking about what opposing hitters know about Vargas now compared to earlier this season. This is his second go-around versus the A's and hitters now have nearly a full season of video to study in regards to facing Vargas -- compared to his partial year in and out of the rotation in 2009.

In other words, the book on him is growing. Could that be part of the problem?

"I think everybody gets to see everybody more and more and what they do and don't do," he said. "You've just got to expect that. You've got to make adjustments."

If it's a tiring arm that's the problem, there isn't much Vargas can do -- other than get extra rest and have his pitch count limited the rest of the way.

But if part of this is opponents better knowing what to expect, then maybe some additional strategy tinkering is in order.

One thing's for sure. Vargas has lost four in a row with a 7.23 ERA over that stretch. Prior to that, his ERA was 3.15.

It could just be a small rough patch. Or a sign of more. Vargas has allowed 18 homers this year and 10-- including two today -- have come in the seven weeks since the All-Star Break. Four have come the past four games.

Coincidence, or not? We'll learn more the season's final three weeks, beginning Sunday.

Athletics 6, Mariners 2: Holiday yawn-fest over real quick

Posted by Geoff Baker

Well, hopefully most of you spent Labor Day doing something more interesting than watching the Mariners for two hours, 19 minutes today. They lose, 6-2, in a game that was pretty much over after a couple of first-inning pitches by Jason Vargas.

Seattle managed just five hits all day against Brett Anderson for 7 2/3 innings and the bullpen the rest of the way. One of the hits was a solo homer by Franklin Gutierrez in a 5-0 game in the seventh inning.

Seattle scored another in the ninth on a sac fly.

So, that's 11 straight games of three runs or fewer scored by Seattle. One more will equal the club record from 1988.

Monday, September 6, 2010

Mariners lose to Athletics, 6-2

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Coco Crisp and Matt Carson each hit solo home runs to back Brett Anderson, and the Oakland Athletics beat the Seattle Mariners 6-2 Monday.

Anderson (4-6) allowed four hits in a season-high 7 2/3 innings and left to a standing ovation. He ended a four-game losing streak that matched the longest of his career.

Then again, most everyone seems to be shutting down Seattle lately. The Mariners have scored three or fewer runs in 11 straight games.

Crisp homered in the first, Oakland's first leadoff homer of the season. It was the third leadoff home run of Crisp's career and his first since Aug. 18, 2003, against Tampa Bay.

Oakland has won six in a row at home against the Mariners. Franklin Gutierrez hit a solo homer in the seventh for Seattle's first run and Jose Lopez had a ninth-inning sacrifice fly.

After Crisp homered, Daric Barton followed Crisp's homer with a triple off the wall in right field that Ichiro Suzuki appeared to lose in the sun. Kurt Suzuki's RBI groundout one batter later made it 2-0.

Crisp added an RBI single in the fourth and Jack Cust singled in a run in the seventh.

Anderson struck out four and didn't walk a batter. He earned just his second win since coming off the disabled list for a second time this year on July 30 from an elbow injury. He got Casey Kotchman to ground into a double play in the second, the first of 13 straight outs by the pitcher before Ichiro's two-out single in the sixth.

Anderson was rewarded in April with a \$12.5 million, four-year contract that includes club options for 2014 and 2015.

The A's have won all their meetings with the Mariners in the Coliseum this season since an opening day loss back on April 5.

Oakland won for the 15th time in its last 20 day games and improved to a majors-best 32-15 in afternoon contests.

Jason Vargas (9-9) lost his fourth straight start and was done after 4 1-3 innings, matching his shortest outing of the year. He allowed five runs on seven hits.

Gutierrez returned to the lineup after missing two games with a stomach bug and recorded an RBI for the fourth straight game. He also hit a ninth-inning double.

Notes: Anderson didn't issue a walk for the fifth time in 2010. ... Carson's fourth-inning leadoff homer snapped an 0-for-15 funk.

Leury Bonilla is a man for every position in West Tennessee's regular-season finale

Just saw my favorite boxscore of the year in the Class AA West Tennessee DiamondJaxx' final regular-season game. For the DiamondJaxx, there's this:

Bonilla, L. CF-LF-RF-2B-SS-3B-1B-C-P.

Leury Bonilla, in his sixth minor league season with the Mariners and hardly a one-dimensional player, played every position on the field. He was far from all-field (and pitch)/no-hit. Bonilla hit a two-run homer in West Tennessee's four-run first inning.

Folks in Jackson, Tenn., not only saw Bonilla become a man of every position, they watched what literally became the last regular-season game by the DiamondJaxx. The organization announced after the game that the team's name will change to the Jackson Generals next year. Here is the story from the DiamondJaxx ... er ... Generals ... site on the name change.

On the field, the DiamondJaxx beat Chattanooga 8-0 in their final game before the Southern League playoffs. Despite all the movement, the ball didn't find Bonilla until the seventh when he caught a popup at first base.

On the mound in the ninth, he struck out Jaime Pedroza to start the inning before Pedro Baez singled. Bonilla then got Alfredo Silverio to ground into a 6-4-3 double play to end the game.

Bonilla signed with the Mariners as a non-drafted free agent in 2002. He's hardly a stranger to every position on the field.

He played them all except center field during the 2007 season at Class A Wisconsin, pitching twice and recording a save by striking out the only hitter he faced Aug. 4 at Fort Wayne.

He also struck out two in an inning of relief in 2008 at Class A High Desert.

Last year at West Tennessee, Bonilla played games at catcher, first base, second, third, shortstop, left field and right field, and he pitched an inning at High Desert after being sent there in July.

Today also marked the first game at West Tennessee for shortstop Nick Franklin, who we wrote yesterday was being moved there after Carlos Triunfel landed on the disabled list because of a bruised finger on his right hand. Franklin started at shortstop, but played second base in the fifth when Bonilla spent an inning at short.

Big 10th gives Everett AquaSox win and series lead

By Nick Patterson
Herald Writer

VANCOUVER, B.C. -- The Everett AquaSox had victory snatched out from underneath them in the bottom of the ninth inning Monday afternoon.

The Vancouver Canadians handed it right back in the 10th.

Everett scored four runs in the top of the 10th inning with the aid of four walks, an error and a dropped foul pop, and the Sox recovered from a ninth-inning thunderbolt to defeat the Canadians 9-5 in their postseason opener.

The victory gave Everett a 1-0 lead in the best-of-three Northwest League division series. It was Everett's first playoff victory in 23 years.

"It feels really good to get that first step into it," said Sox outfielder Robbie Anston, who was 3-for-4 with a pair of RBI doubles. "It's a three-game series, so getting that first win is huge. I definitely feel like we have the upper hand right now, especially getting the big win on the road."

Said Sox manager Jose Moreno: "It was a great game. The kids showed they came ready to play. It was a battle back and forth. We had an opportunity to win the game in the (ninth) inning, but we bounced back. We've been playing real good baseball all year, and I'm real proud of them."

The Sox were making their first foray into the playoffs since 2002, and it looked as though Everett was going to win its first playoff game since 1987 when they were one out away in the bottom of the ninth.

However, the unlikeliest of players shocked Everett's system. Ryan Pineda, who during the season batted .221 and was homerless, went the opposite way with an Eric Valdez pitch and skied it just over the right-field wall for a two-run homer, tying it at 5-5 and forcing extra innings.

"We didn't expect Pineda to hit a home run, especially with two outs in the last inning," Moreno said. "We expect that from (Vancouver sluggers A.J. Kirby-Jones and Michael Choice). But we had a real good bounce back from that."

The Sox also got a little help as the Canadians self-destructed. Vancouver reliever Dan Tenholder faced five batters in the 10th inning, walking four of them -- Terry Serrano's five-pitch free pass forced home the tiebreaking run. One of those walks was drawn by Anston, who was given renewed life when Vancouver third baseman Nino Leyja dropped his foul pop.

Then after Josh Bowman mercifully replaced Tenholder, Canadians shortstop Wade Kirkland bobbled Kevin Mailloux's tailor-made double-play grounder, allowing another run to score. A sacrifice fly by Kevin Rivers and an RBI single by Hawkins Gebbers completed the carnage.

"That kind of thing happens," Anston said. "Being patient, looking for a pitch, everybody did a good job having an approach going up there and it paid off. (Tenholder) ended up walking in the run and I guess that's how baseball works. Sometimes you catch breaks that ways."

Valdez then worked a perfect bottom of the 10th to pick up the win. However, it was Austin Hudson who was the pitching hero for Everett. The right-hander relieved starter Edlando Seco, who struggled with his control as he walked seven in 42/3 innings, in the fifth and shut the Canadians down. He retired all 10 batters he faced, getting seven outs on grounders.

Tenholder took the loss for Vancouver. The righty, who was fantastic during the season with a 1.86 ERA and good control, allowed four runs in 12/3 innings.

Everett jumped out to a 3-0 lead thanks to a pair of two-out rallies. In the top of the third Mailloux and Rivers smacked back-to-back two-out doubles, then Gebbers followed with an infield single that scored Rivers from second. Then in the third Anthony Phillips lined a two-out single to right and scored when Anston launched a double to center.

Seco flirted with disaster through four innings without allowing any runs, but the Canadians finally made him pay in the fifth. With the bases loaded and two out, Seco fired a pitch to the backstop to allow Vancouver's first run. Then Douglas Landaeta ripped a two-run triple off the base of the center-field wall, knotting it at 3-3.

Everett was handed a gift lead in the top of the sixth when, with runners at second and third and one out, reliever Pedro Vidal threw a wild pitch while trying to intentionally walk Phillips. Evan Sharpley dived in safely ahead of the tag to restore Everett's lead. Another run came home on Anston's second RBI double of the game, giving the Sox a 5-3 lead and setting up the dramatic finish.

Do AquaSox have enough left?

As they enter the playoffs, Everett may not be the same team it was in the first half but the Frogs are as confident as ever

By Nick Patterson
Herald writer

The Everett AquaSox just completed a dominating Northwest League season. They finished with easily the best record in the league, and they set a new record for wins since the team affiliated with the Seattle Mariners 16 years ago. The Sox should be the heavy favorites to give Everett just its second championship trophy since joining the league in 1984.

But there's one question hanging over the heads of the Sox. Is there enough of the team left to turn that championship dream into a reality?

Everett begins its quest for its first title since 1985 when the Sox face the Vancouver Canadians today in the first game of their best-of-three divisional playoff series.

But the Sox are not the same team that ripped through the first half of the season. A bevy of player promotions mean that in some ways Everett is a shell of what it was during its peak.

"It's part of the business, guys get shipped through," Sox outfielder Kevin Rivers said. "The guys we have now, that's our team. We're going to roll through with them. We're going to keep playing hard and hopefully we'll come through with a big series win."

Everett was lights out during the first half. The Sox compiled a 27-11 record, finishing a whopping 10 games ahead of Vancouver and Salem-Keizer in the West Division race. Everett clinched the first-half title, and thus a playoff berth, with more than a week remaining in the first-half schedule.

But the Sox may have been a victim of their own success. Shortly after the first half ended a steady stream of players matriculated from Everett to Clinton of the mid single-A Midwest League, which is one step above the Northwest League.

And the Sox were not able to maintain their pace during the second half. Everett still had a solid second half, but the Sox finished behind Vancouver in the division.

So it can be argued that the Canadians hold the momentum. Yet Sox manager Jose Moreno is undeterred.

"We've been playing a solid season all year round," Moreno said. "The players are getting excited about playing Vancouver. It's a short series that could go either way, but we're ready. We're focused and we just have to make sure we don't try to do too much, just play the game and have fun."

Nowhere was Everett's player drain felt more strongly than with the pitching staff. A total of eight pitchers who played key roles on Everett's staff have moved on. That included solid starters Tom Wilhelmson and Yoervis Medina, as well as bullpen dominators Forrest Snow and Stephen Pryor.

And the hits kept coming right up to the end of the season. Converted infielder Ogui Diaz was just beginning to excel after altering his delivery to throw sidearm. So naturally he was called up to Clinton last week, after being expected to play an important role in Everett's bullpen during the playoffs.

The Sox have seen those pitcher numbers replenished, either by players demoted from higher levels or promoted from rookie ball. However, none of the newcomers have performed as well as the pitchers they replaced.

"We lost a bunch of guys who helped us out a lot, but at the same time we've got guys in who helped us out since they left," said Sox starter Chris Sorce, who's scheduled to start the if-necessary Game 3. "I've been here the whole year and my start I'm going to pitch my butt off, put the game on my shoulders."

The good news for Everett is that the offense remains largely intact. The only position players who were promoted were third baseman Mickey Wiswall and outfielder Ryan Royster. Neither player began the season with the team, and the Sox had sufficient depth to deal with both their departures.

And the big bats are still here. The power-hitting pair of Rivers and third baseman Kevin Mailloux gives Everett a potent middle of the lineup. Second baseman Terry Serrano and outfielder Robbie Anston are pesky hitters who are quality table setters at the top of the lineup.

All of which is crucial for Everett as, given the lack of proven depth on the pitching staff, the offense is going to have to carry the Sox.

"One through nine, even the guys on the bench, they always come up with good approaches," Rivers said. "We're coming up with hits in the right situations. Even if the lineup is shuffled up we're not losing any power.

"We've just got to keep playing with what we have," Rivers concluded. "You can't control who leaves, who stays, you just have to play hard."

Tacoma News Tribune

09/07/10 12:05 am

Wan Gutierrez still better than ruddy alternatives

LARRY LARUE; Staff writer

OAKLAND – Franklin Gutierrez looked a bit wan Monday morning – and everyone with the Seattle Mariners thought that was an improvement.

The center fielder had missed the previous two games with a stomach virus, something he'd picked up from his family last week. With it, he wasn't able to go much further than the dugout, and only then because there were ... well ... facilities nearby.

"I'm better," Gutierrez said Monday.

That was enough for interim manager Daren Brown, who wrote him into the Seattle lineup, batting third.

"He feels and looks a lot better, there's a little spring in his step again," Brown said.

"The way he plays, there's no pacing himself. He sees a ball in the air and he'll crash into a fence going after it. He's always sliding, diving, going all out. And, offensively, he's a threat."

Gutierrez proved that by hitting his 11th home run in what became Seattle's 6-2 loss to Oakland.

"He may be having what people call a down year, but after last season, you know what he's capable of," Brown said. "And he could be capable of more."

LOOKING AHEAD

With 24 games left and 84 losses, the Mariners need only go 9-15 to avoid a 100-loss season, but that's not nearly as easy as it sounds.

Looking ahead, they play the Athletics, Angels, Red Sox, Rangers, Blue Jays and Rays, then finish the season with the Rangers and Athletics again.

The Mariners' record against those six teams in 2010: 14-30.

MR. EFFICIENCY

Russell Branyan's 23rd home run on Sunday was his 13th with Seattle in 43 games this season, and moved him into rarified air on the franchise power charts.

Ken Phelps averaged a home run each 13.32 at-bats for the Mariners during his career – best in team history with a minimum of 700 plate appearances. Second to Phelps was Ken Griffey Jr., who homered each 15.15 at-bats.

That order has now changed.

Brryan has played 164 games as a Mariner over the last two seasons, and hit 44 home runs – one for every 13.66 at-bats. That has him sandwiched between Phelps and Griffey.

SHORT HOPS

Ichiro Suzuki's sixth-inning single extended his hitting streak to eight games, during which he's collected 14 hits. He has 179 hits this season, and needs 21 in last 24 games to reach 200 for the 10th year in a row. ... Gutierrez drove in a run in his fourth consecutive game, a career high. He now has a team-leading 54 RBI this season.

ON TAP

Seattle faces the Athletics in Oakland in a 7:07 p.m. game today that will be televised on FSN. Probable starting pitchers: Seattle's Doug Fister (4-11, 3.85) vs. Dallas Braden 9-10, 3.23).

What else is new: M's bats go meekly

Staff writer

Published: 09/07/10 12:05 am

OAKLAND – The Seattle Mariners offense is so consistently awful that after any loss, it falls to the pitching staff to largely explain what happened.

Why?

Seattle hitters talk like they hit – rarely, and without power.

So when the Mariners suffered their 84th loss of the season, this one a 6-2 defeat at the hands of the Oakland Athletics, the onus fell on starting pitcher Jason Vargas to talk.

After all, Vargas fell behind 2-0 in the first inning – and Seattle's offense never got closer than that.

"They hit some balls out, led off some innings with doubles and the rest is history," Vargas said. "I know I didn't expect Coco Crisp to hit a fastball out of here, but on my second pitch, he did."

Interim manager Daren Brown said Vargas, a nine-game winner – and loser – was in a dogfight for outs in his 42/3 innings.

"He wasn't sharp, he was a little up in the strike zone," Brown said. "We're aware this is the most innings he's ever thrown in a season, that's one reason we got him out after 80 pitches and four-plus innings.

"He's a command guy, and that's a lot of pitches in that few innings."

And the offense?

What offense?

This was the 11th consecutive game the Mariners have scored three runs or fewer, and they're 4-7 in those games – largely because they won a pair of shutouts. They remain 30th in baseball in most every offensive category.

"I know it's not lack of effort," batting coach Alonzo Powell said. "We're getting hits, but what we're not getting is the hit that extends an inning, keeps a rally going. Everyone in baseball is looking for the big hit this time of year.

"We just can't find it right now. We can't get anything going and sustain it."

After games, most hitters shower, dress and fly.

There's not much to say in a season where the team has gone 54-84 and the offense is clearly the villain of the piece.

On Monday against Brett Anderson – who came in 3-6 – they managed four hits in 7 2/3 innings.

The one run Anderson allowed was a solo home run to Franklin Gutierrez, who played for the first time in three days because of a stomach virus.

Gutierrez had two hits, the rest of the team three.

After the game, Gutierrez was getting treatment and was unavailable.

So it fell to Vargas, Brown and Powell to talk about this game and this team.

Vargas, who had pitched well enough in his first 27 starts to win another five or six of them, didn't pitch well enough to win his 10th this time. And that 10th victory has proven elusive.

Since winning his ninth on Aug. 14, Vargas has started four times – and lost each game. Much of the damage against him has come early, and when Oakland scored twice in the first inning it continued a trend the left-hander can't seem to stop.

In each of those last four starts, Vargas has allowed at least one run in the first inning. With a Mariners offense that simply cannot score with the rest of major league baseball, an early deficit often means a quick loss.

This one certainly did.

"I've had streaks where that's happened, streaks where it hasn't," Vargas said. " ... The last seven, eight starts I've thrown more fastballs to get ahead. I wish I'd thrown more of them down today."

When the Mariners got to the ninth inning trailing 6-1, they epitomized Powell's theory. They got hits – just not the big hits.

Chone Figgins walked and Gutierrez doubled him to third with one out, bringing on closer Andrew Bailey. And that was that. Russell Branyan popped out. Jose Lopez flied out to score Figgins. Casey Kotchman struck out.

No matter how well Vargas or his bullpen had thrown Monday, two runs was all they had to work with.

Asked if he'd managed teams so offensively challenged in his career, Brown shook his head and laughed.

"That doesn't happen often in the Pacific Coast League," he deadpanned.

"I'm looking at the positives, and we've gotten two or three guys hot. I think Ichiro (Suzuki), Branyan and Kotchman came in with hitting streaks," Brown said. "You get some guys hitting, it can be contagious. It's not like we're incapable of scoring – we're just not getting it done."

Aside from Ichiro's .312 average – which is 21 points below his career average – no Mariner is having what might charitably be labeled a good season.

Figgins, a career .291 hitter, is batting .244.

Gutierrez, a .268 lifetime hitter, is batting .252.

Branyan (.238) is batting .241. Lopez (.271) is batting .238. Kotchman (.268) is batting .226. Adam Moore (.217) is batting .190.

Go ahead, make a high-powered offense starting with that group. Add in Josh Wilson, Michael Saunders, Ryan Langerhans, Chris Woodward, Josh Bard ...

That's the offense the pitching staff must speak for.

Rainiers go down swinging in regular-season finale

DELTON LOWERY; Contributing writer
09/07/10

FRESNO, Calif. – With a second straight Pacific Coast League Pacific North Division title already in hand, Tacoma came out as free swinging as ever in its regular-season finale Monday afternoon.

The good: Three home runs gave the Rainiers a season-record tying 185 home runs.

The bad: The big blasts also came with some big whiffs as the Rainiers struck out 13 times in a 9-6 loss to the Fresno Grizzlies at Chukchansi Park.

"The strikeouts are gonna happen," Tacoma interim manager Jose Castro said. "But the thing is how we're striking out.

"There are pitches we're swinging at that we have no business swinging at. Borderline pitches I can see sometimes chasing because pitchers have pretty good stuff, too. I understand that. But to (swing at bad pitches) consistently is not a good thing."

The Rainiers struck out a season-high 16 times in Friday's series opener, a 12-inning loss. There were 10 strikeouts Saturday and 12 strikeouts – all going down swinging – Sunday to push Tacoma's strikeout total to 51 in the four-game series.

That could pose a problem as the Rainiers (74-69) travel a few hours north up Highway 99 to Sacramento, where they will face the Pacific South Champion River Cats (79-65) in a best-of-5 series beginning Wednesday.

Sacramento will start Clayton Mortensen (13-6, 4.25), a 6-foot-4 right-hander who has 112 strikeouts in 165 innings this season with the River Cats, Oakland's Triple-A affiliate. Mortensen also has one start for the A's this season, July 3 at Cleveland, where he struck out seven Indians in six innings with three earned runs in a no-decision.

"He's a sinkerballer, has a good change-up and knows how to pitch," Castro said of Mortensen.

But a left-handed hitting lineup could bode well for Tacoma against Mortensen.

"It's good. We've got a lot of lefties," Castro said of Dustin Ackley, Mike Carp, Brad Nelson, Matt Mangini and Tug Hulett to go with a switch-hitting Justin Smoak. "I think the River Cats have two lefties in their bullpen. It's gonna hopefully be a nice series."

At the moment Castro plans on starting Blake Beavan (2-2, 6.47) Wednesday but said the decision was not set in stone.

Tacoma again got off to a hot start Monday, taking a 6-2 lead on Carp's RBI single and Smoak's three-run homer in the first inning and solo shots by Nelson and Ackley in the second and fourth.

But Fresno countered with a run in the fifth, three in the sixth and three more in the seventh for the victory.

WELCOME TO TRIPLE-A

With catcher Rob Johnson going on the disabled list, Jose Yopez was promoted from Double-A West Tennessee. Batting eighth, Yopez's first at-bat came with one on and two out in the first inning. After two called strikes and two balls, Yopez's first swing was good for a single through the hole to right. He finished 2-for-4 with a walk.

"He did a real good job," Castro said.

SHORT HOPS

The Rainiers also hit 185 home runs in 2008. ... With his first-inning home run on Sunday, Greg Halman tied Dan Rohrmeier (1997) for third on the Rainiers' single-season list with 33. Adrian Garrett holds the record with 43 homers in 1971 and Danny Walton is second with 35 in 1974. ... The playoff berth is the 12th for Tacoma since 1960.

ON TAP

The Rainiers will open their five-game series at 7:05 p.m. Wednesday in Sacramento. The game will be broadcast live on 850-AM, with Mike Curto doing the play-by-play.

PLAYOFF SCHEDULE

Wednesday: At Sacramento, 7:05 p.m.

Thursday: At Sacramento, 7:05 p.m.

Friday: At Safeco Field, 7 p.m.

Saturday: At Safeco Field, noon *

Sunday: At Safeco Field, 7 p.m. *

*-if necessary

AOL Fanhouse

Mariners Farmhand Leury Bonilla Plays All Nine Positions in Game

By FanHouse Staff

You've heard of utility players and even the newer variation known as super-utility players, but we'll have to find a new label to apply to Mariners minor leaguer Leury Bonilla after what he did Monday.

Bonilla, 25, had a change of scenery in every inning, playing all nine positions for the Double-A West Tenn Diamond Jaxx in their regular season finale. And it wasn't as if he just stood around at each position and called it an accomplishment; Bonilla managed to hit a home run and contribute a sacrifice fly in his four trips to the plate and didn't allow a run in the inning he pitched.

His box score line is pretty impressive, reading CF-LF-RF-2B-SS-3B-1B-C-P as he worked his way around the diamond.

Once he got to the mound in the ninth, he needed only 10 pitches to close out Chattanooga and wrap up a comfortable 8-0 win for West Tenn. He even collected a strikeout in the process, but that batter, Jamie Pedroza, shouldn't feel too bad. Bonilla actually has something of a record as a strikeout pitcher, with eight strikeouts in 5 1/3 career innings heading into Monday.

Though others have accomplished the nine positions in nine innings feat before Bonilla, he'll be the last West Tenn Diamond Jaxx player to accomplish the feat. For after Sunday's game, the franchise announced it will be known as the Jackson Generals starting next spring.

Seattle PI

A's offense does plenty, gets Anderson another win

By JANIE MCCAULEY
AP BASEBALL WRITER

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Brett Anderson had a comfortable cushion for a change. He could breathe and just pitch.

Coco Crisp and Matt Carson each hit a solo home run to back Anderson, and the Oakland Athletics beat the Seattle Mariners 6-2 on Monday.

"Brett looked like Brett," Carson said.

Anderson (4-6) allowed four hits in a season-high 7 2-3 innings and left to a standing ovation. He ended a four-game losing streak that matched the longest of his career.

Then again, most everyone seems to be shutting down Seattle lately. The Mariners have scored three or fewer runs in 11 straight games.

Crisp homered in the first, Oakland's only leadoff homer of the season. It was the third leadoff drive of his career and first since Aug. 18, 2003, with Cleveland against Tampa Bay.

"It's always good to get run support, especially the first play of the game," Anderson said. "You can settle in and throw strikes."

Oakland has won six in a row at home against the Mariners. Franklin Gutierrez hit a solo homer in the seventh for Seattle's first run and Jose Lopez had a ninth-inning sacrifice fly.

After Crisp homered, Daric Barton followed with a triple that took a tough bounce off the wall in right field for Ichiro Suzuki. Kurt Suzuki's RBI groundout one batter later made it 2-0.

Crisp added an RBI single in the fourth and Jack Cust singled in a run in the seventh.

Anderson struck out four and didn't walk a batter. He earned his second win since coming off the disabled list for a second time this year on July 30 from an elbow injury. He got Casey Kotchman to ground into a double play in the second, the first of 13 straight outs by the pitcher before Suzuki's two-out single in the sixth.

"He's shown he can do that before. Overall, we didn't do a whole lot against them," Mariners interim manager Daren Brown said. "He's going to get ahead and pound the strike zone, and that's what he did."

Anderson, one of the organization's top pitching prospects as a rookie last season, sure would like to get on a roll to end what has been an up-and-down year.

"I felt really good from the mid-to-late second inning and the rest of the way," Anderson said. "You've just got to grind it out a couple more starts. I've pitched fairly well since coming off the DL the second time."

Anderson was rewarded in April with a \$12.5 million, four-year contract that includes club options for 2014 and 2015.

A's manager Bob Geren wants to see Anderson stay healthy and continue to be effective.

"He feels great, his body, and he's pitching well," Geren said. "He's been pretty consistent. I just feel like he's going to finish strong."

The A's have won all their meetings with the Mariners in the Coliseum this season since an opening-day loss back on April 5.

Oakland won for the 15th time in its last 20 day games and improved to a major league-best 32-15 in afternoon contests.

The A's jumped on Jason Vargas (9-9) right away. He lost his fourth straight start and was done after 4 1-3 innings, matching his shortest outing of the year. He allowed five runs and seven hits.

"They hit some balls hard and it seemed like every inning they were leading off with a double or something," Vargas said. "You're not expecting Coco Crisp to hit the ball out of the yard on the second pitch of the game. It was a fastball up but it was away and he still got around on it. I can't chalk that up to anything but bad luck. It seems the last seven or eight starts guys are being a little more patient, so I started throwing more fastballs to counter that. You just have to make adjustments."

Gutierrez returned to the lineup after missing two games with a stomach bug and recorded an RBI for the fourth straight game. He also hit a ninth-inning double.

Notes: Anderson didn't issue a walk for the fifth time in 2010. ... Carson's fourth-inning leadoff homer snapped an 0-for-15 funk. ... Anderson is 15-3 in 24 career starts when getting support of two or more runs.

ESPN

A's offense does plenty, gets Anderson another win

By JANIE McCAULEY

AP Baseball Writer

Tuesday, Sep. 7, 2010

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Coco Crisp and Matt Carson each hit solo home runs to back Brett Anderson, and the Oakland Athletics beat the Seattle Mariners 6-2 Monday.

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After Crisp homered, Daric Barton followed Crisp's homer with a triple off the wall in right field that Ichiro Suzuki appeared to lose in the sun. Kurt Suzuki's RBI groundout one batter later made it 2-0.

Crisp added an RBI single in the fourth and Jack Cust singled in a run in the seventh.

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A's handle Mariners as Brett Anderson ends personal 4-game slide

Associated Press

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