

Yankees complete three-game sweep of A's

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

Ten in a row, 14 of 15 and 24 of 28.

The way the New York Yankees have bludgeoned the A's this week and over the past few years, you would think these were the Bronx Bombers of Ruth and Gehrig or Mantle and Maris.

The Yankees still are a talented bunch, of course, but their dominance of Oakland is bordering on the absurd. They not only completed a three-game sweep of the A's on Wednesday by cruising to a 4-2 victory, but they also blew through Oakland's three best starters in the process.

After beating Trevor Cahill 5-0 on Monday and Brett Anderson 10-3 on Tuesday, the Yankees handed Gio Gonzalez a loss courtesy of a three-run, fourth-inning home run by the man he was once traded for, Nick Swisher.

The Yankees outscored the A's 19-5 in the three-game set and trailed just once -- for 2 1/2 innings in the final game when Josh Willingham's two-run, first-inning homer gave Oakland a brief 2-1 lead.

Manager Bob Geren's view of the mounting carnage?

"They're not that much superior, no," Geren said. "Is there an explanation? Obviously, they scored more runs than we did and beat us. But no team should really have that kind of dominance over another one in our league. Our pitching's too good. It's just mostly coincidence."

More coincidental data: The A's have lost nine consecutive series to the Yankees dating to 2007, and 10 of their last 11 games in Oakland. The 10-game losing streak against the Yankees is the longest since the club began playing here in 1968.

Most disturbing is that the sweep completely burst the A's bubble after their best run of the year -- four wins in a row and five of six. Now they head out on a 10-game trip to Boston, Baltimore and Chicago. No trip to New York, fortunately, but the A's still have six more games against the Yankees in July and August, all at Yankee Stadium.

Gonzalez gave the best effort of the A's top three starters, but one bad inning proved to be his undoing. In the fourth, he gave up a leadoff single to Alex Rodriguez and walked Robinson Cano on four pitches. After Gonzalez got behind 2-0 to Swisher, A's pitching coach Ron Romanick went to the mound while Swisher -- who thought he was supposed to bunt on the first two pitches -- conferred with his third-base coach, Robert Thomson.

"I asked him, 'Do you want me to bunt?' and he said, 'No, turn it loose,' " Swisher said.

Which he did. He launched a missile into the left-field seats, just his fourth homer of the year but one that was all the Yankees needed against the A's.

New York starter A.J. Burnett (6-3) limited Oakland to three hits over seven innings -- two of those in the first -- then Joba Chamberlain and Mariano Rivera contributed a scoreless inning apiece to end it.

Gonzalez (5-3), whose three-game winning streak was snapped, denied that the A's young starters might have been intimidated by the Yankees lineup during this series.

"This is a team you have to attack early," he said. "Right away, you have to let them know you're going to give them everything you've got. You can't cruise, either. Once you think you've got them under your belt, they're quick to get a little rally going. We did our best to minimize the damage, but all it took was one mistake pitch."

The A's did all their scoring in the first when David DeJesus hit a one-out double and Willingham hit his 10th homer of the season with two out.

They really had just two more scoring chances the rest of the way. Coco Crisp tripled with two out in the fifth but was left stranded. In the eighth, Crisp and DeJesus had back-to-back singles with one out, but Conor Jackson hit a sharp liner back to Chamberlain, who turned and converted an inning-ending double play.

Oakland A's update: Struggling Hideki Matsui sits against old teammates New York Yankees

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

Frustration is mounting for the A's designated hitter Hideki Matsui, who for the second straight day wasn't in the lineup against a New York Yankees right-handed starter.

Matsui went 0 for 3 on Monday, dropping his average in May to .197, and he is hitting just .222 with three homers and 19 RBIs this season. Manager Bob Geren said he has better options. Matsui was in the on-deck circle to pinch-hit when the game ended Wednesday.

"He's struggling a little bit right now, and we've got a couple of other guys swinging the bat pretty good," Geren said. "I fully expect him to be fine and contribute and have a fine second half."

Matsui didn't question the manager's benching but maintained it's going to be challenging to work through his slump if he's not in the lineup on a regular basis.

"Obviously, not being able to play is kind of a difficult situation where in order to get out of a slump, you have to play," Matsui said through interpreter Roger Kahlon. "But if you're not playing, then it's hard to get out of it. It's one of those Catch-22 situations."

Did it hurt not to be playing against his old teammates the past two days?

"Regardless of whether it's your former teammates or not, the desire for any player is to be able to play every day," Matsui said. "Obviously, realistically, I haven't been contributing, so it's a bit disappointing not to be out there."

Matsui hit under .200 for the Los Angeles Angels last year in May but responded to finish the season hitting .274 with 21 home runs. At this point last year, he had seven homers and 27 RBIs.

Matsui was asked if he thought if a continued lack of production might jeopardize his place on the A's roster.

"That's not really my decision," he said. "But as far as results, that applies to any player, and in order to play in this league, you have to be productive."

Daric Barton also was on the bench for the second straight day. He is hitting .177 over his last 38 games (25 for 141) and is the only starting first baseman in the major leagues without a homer.

Catcher Kurt Suzuki confirmed he spoke with general manager Billy Beane about avoiding home-plate collisions however possible. "He just said, 'What happened to Buster Posey was awful, kind of a freak accident, but basically I don't want that to happen to you. I don't want you to have surgery and to be out the rest of the year,' " Suzuki said. "He was just reiterating that."

Monte Poole: A's owners Lew Wolff and John Fisher detached, oblivious to fans' needs, wants

By Monte Poole, Bay Area News Group

Though John Fisher and Lew Wolff have owned the A's for more than six years, they needed only the first two to take what once was a good franchise with an engaged fan base and starve it into lethargic inertia.

Moreover, Fisher and Wolff have shown no inclination of tending to their team anytime soon.

They have become a wealthy guy (Wolff) and an obscenely wealthy guy (Fisher) who acquired a valuable property, neglected it outright and continue to reap profits. It's the slumlord model.

In that context, being swept over three games at home by the Yankees doesn't register -- nor does the 4-2 loss to New York on Wednesday, which closed out the series and is Oakland's 10th consecutive loss to the Yankees and 24th in 28 games.

Ask A's manager Bob Geren about the trend, and he shrugs it off as "mostly coincidence."

Ask his boss, general manager Billy Beane, and he insinuates it's a small part of a long season -- and not especially alarming when one team is vastly better funded, infinitely deeper and more advanced.

"What I saw," Beane summarized, "was us sweep three from Baltimore, then get swept by the Yankees in three games."

That's where the A's are as they enter June and the decisions to come with it. For the fourth season in five, they are jogging in heavy fog, except when stumbling backward. They have settled in and become Pirates West, without the gorgeous yard.

The heartbreaking thing for the fan -- and the player who truly cares -- is that none of the team executives is particularly enraged about this squalid condition, much less committed to promoting and demanding improvement.

While the spirit of former Oakland owner Walter Haas looks on aghast, Wolff occasionally offers disingenuous rhetoric about the desire to win games. Fisher, despite an appreciably greater financial stake in the team, stays stone silent -- as if he is unaffiliated with the A's in every conceivable way.

We know they want a new ballpark and that the A's would greatly benefit from it. We know they want it accompanied by retail/residential development. We know they have a strong preference for San Jose, though that possibility is shrinking by the hour.

Meanwhile, though, there are games to play, almost every day.

And new ballpark or not, emotionally invested owners realize those games still matter because fans should matter. Even if they don't care, their business still represents them.

It isn't that Wolff and Fisher have to sweat out every minute, in the manner of Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban. Or that they have to spend money as if the Rapture is upon us, as Daniel Snyder does for his NFL team in Washington.

But if Wolff or Fisher were to become more visible and offer sincere expressions of concern for baseball, along with a buck or two, it might pump fresh oxygen into a stale product.

Instead, they mostly peep from afar, treating the A's like poorly maintained income property. They want to vacate Oakland and, meanwhile, they have no intention to fix the place. Despite the occasional rumor, they resist the notion to sell -- so far.

So we have this constant flow of mostly forgettable players coming and going, except good old Mark Ellis, perhaps because he's modest and earnest and unsung, the good soldier -- with characteristics that perfectly project what the A's have become.

We have Geren, who seems decent enough. He isn't so much clueless as charmless and utterly sleep-inducing, perhaps by design.

We have Beane, who was so energetic and daring at the dawn of the millennium -- there was a time when his presence was presumed to ensure a competitive product -- but has lost his mojo or been ostracized by certain general managers or been financially minimized into irrelevance.

Billy now seems to be awaiting youngsters such as Michael Choice and Grant Green and Jemile Weeks, without identifying anyone as a "centerpiece" player.

All of which brings us back before the imported loafers of Wolff and Fisher, who according to Forbes magazine represent the fourth-richest ownership in baseball -- wealthier than the Los Angeles Angels' Arte Moreno or the Boston Red Sox's John Henry.

Not that you could discern such wherewithal from the Oakland payroll or lineup, both of which suggest the annual and very welcome revenue-sharing checks serve to line the wallets of the owners.

June means we're officially closing in on summer, when observations and evaluations dictate midseason decisions. The A's again, sadly, look more like sellers than buyers.

Given ownership's casual negligence, though, it's clear that whatever the team looks like isn't necessarily influential.

Chin Music: Matsui sits again against a right-hander, frustrations mounting

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune, 6/1/2011 12:33pm

In for Joe Stiglich today, who's getting an early jump on Boston ...

Frustrations are building up for the A's high-profile designated hitter acquisition Hideki Matsui. For starters, he hasn't been designated the past two days to be in the lineup against his old team, the New York Yankees, even though the Yanks have sent back-to-back right-handed pitchers to the mound, Freddy Garcia on Tuesday night and A.J. Burnett Wednesday afternoon. Matsui went 0-for-3 Monday, dropping his average in May to .197, and he is hitting just .222 with 3 homers and 19 RBIs for the season.

So why isn't he in the lineup? Bob Geren made it plain and simple: He has better options right now. David DeJesus took two players' spots Wednesday — he was in Matsui's DH role and he also was hitting second in Daric Barton's spot. Barton also got a second consecutive day on the bench.

"I think he's struggling a little bit right now and we've got a couple of other guys swinging the bat pretty good, so I'm just putting some other guys in," Geren said. "I fully expect him to be fine and contribute and have a fine second half." Geren is keeping the faith that Matsui eventually will respond.

"Everybody has hot and cold spells," he said. "I fully expect him to be fine. I'll get him back in there and I believe he'll to have a good year for us, I really do. But right now, I'm kind of looking at it day-to-day and we've got so many guys who deserve playing time and he understands that. He's been great about it, a real professional."

Matsui doesn't argue Geren's position, but maintained that it's going to be challenging to work through his slump if he's not in the lineup. Does it hurt not to be playing against his old teammates?

"Regardless of whether it's your former teammates or not, the desire for any player is to be able to play every day," Matsui said through interpreter Roger Kahlon. "Obviously, realistically, I haven't been contributing, so it's a bit disappointing not to be out there."

Matsui said he's been in these kinds of slumps before. To wit, he hit under under .184 for Angels last year in May but responded to finish the season hitting .274 with 21 home runs. At this point last year, he had 7 homers along with 27 RBIs. It could be more difficult this year, however, because of the interleague situation and Oakland's apparent decision not to play him in the outfield. Matsui only pinch-hit when the A's played in San Francisco. The A's still have a six-game National League road trip coming up at the end of the month.

Matsui, who until the past two seasons was never known as a slow starter, said flatly it will be difficult to overcome his hitting troubles if he doesn't play.

"Obviously, not being able to play is kind of a difficult situation where in order to get out of a slump, you have to play," he said. "But if you're not playing, then it's hard to get out of it. It's one of those Catch-22 situations."

Told of Geren's confidence he will come out of his slump, he said, "I'd like to believe so, too, but in order for the results to come you have to play."

Matsui was asked if he thought if a continued lack of production might jeopardize his place on the roster.

"As far as the decision of staying on the team, that's not really my decision," he said. "But as far as results, that applies to any player, and in order to play in this league, you have to be productive."

Here are the lineups:

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

Yankees: SS Jeter, CF Granderson, 1B Teixeira, DH Rodriguez, 2B Cano, RF Swisher, C Martin, LF Jones, 3B Nunez. P Burnett

A's manager calls Yankees dominance a coincidence

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

The manager's job is to keep the troops believing in themselves. Following a 10th straight loss to the Yankees dating to last season, Bob Geren unconditionally backed his A's by calling New York's streak a "coincidence."

"I mean, no team should really have that kind of dominance over another one in our league," Geren said after Wednesday's 4-2 loss completed the Yankees' three-game sweep. "Our pitching's too good. It's just more of a coincidence."

Coincidence or not, it's the A's longest skid against New York since they were the Kansas City A's and dropped 14 straight in 1956 and '57. The A's were outscored 19-5 in the series and 63-20 over the 10 losses.

"Geren said it was a coincidence?" asked the Yankees' Nick Swisher. "I wouldn't say it's a coincidence."

After twice showing bunt in the fourth inning, Swisher hit a three-run homer off Gio Gonzalez to put the Yankees ahead 4-2. The A's had led 2-1 on Josh Willingham's first-inning homer.

Geren insisted his young team wasn't in awe of the Bronx Bombers.

"We don't necessarily play differently," he said. "We don't play tighter or anything like that. Our pitchers are aggressive. Our hitters ... I mean, the first night, they had a great pitching performance (by Bartolo Colon), and the other two (against Freddy Garcia and A.J. Burnett), we didn't swing that well."

The last eight innings, the A's bats were absent, except for Coco Crisp, who reached in the third (walk, stolen base), fifth (triple) and eighth (single) with nothing to show for it. Burnett went seven innings, and Joba Chamberlain and Mariano Rivera finished it.

Gonzalez chalked it up as a learning experience after grooving a 2-0 fastball to Swisher, the former A's outfielder who was dealt to the White Sox in January 2008 and the Yankees after that season.

In fact, Gonzalez joined the A's organization as a result of the Swisher trade, something Swisher said didn't hit him until Wednesday morning. Swisher also said he missed a sign and thought he was supposed to sacrifice in the fourth inning. Once he realized he was wrong, he homered.

Pitching coach Ron Romanick visited the mound when the count was 2-0. But once Gonzalez realized Swisher wasn't going to bunt again, he said, he should have altered his strategy.

"You learn from your mistakes," Gonzalez said. "The way (Swisher) set up, you easily could have gone with something else."

Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson and Gonzalez, Oakland's best starters, sported an 8.35 ERA in the series. The Yankees, after losing consecutive games in Seattle, have won four in a row.

"We've got so much talent," Swisher said. "This team is so deep, anybody could go out there and get the job done. After losing those two tough games in Seattle, to come back here and play the way we did, that shows true tenacity."

A's Hideki Matsui unused to sitting

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Hideki Matsui was out of the lineup three times in four games, including Tuesday and Wednesday when the Yankees started right-handed pitchers. In the past, he'd almost always play against righties.

"Not being able to play is kind of a difficult situation," Matsui said through interpreter **Roger Kahlon**. "In order to get out of your slump, you have to play. But if you're not playing, it's hard to get out of it."

Matsui is hitting .222 and coming off a .197 May, and manager **Bob Geren** predicted the designated hitter will rebound with a "nice second half," to which Matsui said, "I'd like to believe so, too, but in order for the results to come, you have to play."

Matsui, who turns 37 on June 12, isn't accustomed to sitting when healthy, but he's not in denial about his numbers, saying, "Realistically, I haven't been contributing. It's disappointing, but that's the reality."

He also struggled in May 2010, hitting .184, but wound up at .274, which was noted by general manager **Billy Beane**, who said, "Last year in Anaheim, he finished strong. You take a step back and understand it's a long season."

Beane said it would be "jumping to conclusions" to suggest Matsui is at the end of the line (a concern for Japanese media), adding that Geren is trying different combinations to try to get the offense rolling. The DHs the past two games were **Josh Willingham** and **David DeJesus**, with **Ryan Sweeney** getting starts in left and right, respectively.

Asked about sticking with the team all season, Matsui said, "That's not really my decision. As far as results, that applies really to any player. In order to play and stay, you've got to be productive."

Briefly: The A's went 8-12 in their stretch of 20 games without a day off but were outscored just 78-73. ... In a rehab game with Triple-A Sacramento, **Adam Rosales** played third base and went 3-for-4 with a triple, double and RBI.

Leading off

Unofficial: Manager Bob Geren said the rotation hasn't been set for the series in Boston, despite the team notes distributed to the press. Guillermo Moscoso's turn could be skipped because of today's off day.

Nothing really changes about plays at plate

Scott Ostler, San Francisco Chronicle

Kurt Suzuki managed to avoid calamitous home-plate collisions during the A's threegame series with the Yankees.

Credit Suzuki's safe passage to A's general manager Billy Beane, who instructed his catcher not to block home plate at the finish of any New York home run trot.

The Yankees swept the three games, outscoring the A's 19-5.

The Bronx Bombers bombed four home runs in the series, good for nine runs. The A's homered twice.

We kid. Beane did give Suzuki official clarification of company policy on avoiding homeplate collisions, but Beane was referring to plays involving live baserunners, not Yankee-type trotters.

The A's have an uncanny knack for making strange news. As in: the recent flap over what some A's saw as a lack of communication with manager Bob Geren.

One of last season's quirkiest ongoing stories was Dallas Braden's turf war with Yankees third baseman Alex Rodriguez. More recent quirky news:

Beane telling an ESPN reporter that he (Beane) has instructed Suzuki to avoid offering himself as a crash-test dummy by blocking the plate.

That wouldn't be news, except that:

It's another side story in the ongoing debate set off by Buster Posey's injury.

It feeds the perception that much A's news is an offshoot of Giants news (see: A's await MLB's yea or nay on moving the team into Giants' territory).

It feeds the perception that Beane, not Geren, runs the A's show.

On Tuesday, ESPN's Buster Olney reported Beane's advice to Suzuki.

"It kind of surprised me that (Olney's story) was such big a deal," Beane said after Wednesday afternoon's game.

I said that some TV guys and other observers commented that such advice is typically delivered by the manager, not the general manager.

"I didn't know it was a chain-of-command issue," Beane said.

Beane has a point.

There is no reason a general manager shouldn't give that type of advice and counsel to a player.

On another team, it probably wouldn't have raised eyebrows. But these are the A's, who have a unique GM.

"Really, what (Beane) says is all that matters," Suzuki said. "He's the boss. He's the GM. You've got to kind of do what he says. He even told me, whatever he says matters, whatever anybody else says doesn't matter, just deal with whatever comes from him, is what the final say is."

Understand, Suzuki was not saying that Beane was pulling rank on Geren. Suzuki was referring to advice from outsiders.

But it goes to show you: When you're going bad, nothing sounds right, and the A's are going bad.

By the way, on this whole catcher debate/ controversy, the final result is this: Nothing has changed, nothing has been clarified. After all the discussion set in motion by Posey's injury, after all the opinions and suggestions of managers, players, media and fans — no policy or opinion has changed.

Plays at home will continue to be an adventure, each as unique as

a snowflake. And nothing has changed in the A's plateprotection philosophy.

Suzuki, Geren and Beane agreed that Beane's counsel to Suzuki was simply a reminder, not in any way a change of policy.

"I was really reaffirming (to Suzuki) that the approach of planting yourself at the plate without the ball is not a good idea," Beane said.

Suzuki said that's one of the first things he learned in the big leagues.

"When (Mike) Piazza was here and I first got called up," Suzuki said, "he told me, 'If you don't have the ball, get out of the way.' Plain and simple. If you don't have the ball in your hand, why get run over?"

Suzuki added, "If you're not right in front of home plate and you don't have the ball in your hand and (the runner) comes straight for you and runs you over, that's a dirty play. I'm not going to be in a position where I'm standing in front of the plate and he has no choice but to run me over, even if I don't have the ball in my hand."

That has to be the thinking of almost every catcher.

But if the catcher opts to not block the plate, but to catch the ball and make a swipe or dive tag, the baserunner's options remain the same: Try to beat the tag, or, if you think the catcher has a good chance to tag you out, slam him, a la Scott Cousins, to knock the ball loose.

Any catcher making a tag attempt is near the plate, so the runner would not need to make a dramatic swerve to blow up the catcher, just a slight course adjustment.

In crucial situations, catchers and runners will continue to do whatever they need to do.

To recap: Nothing has changed. Not the A's policy, not the approach of any major-league catchers or baserunners.

And there is no change in the steady flow of quirky and not-so-happy news from the Oakland A's .

Drumbeat: Why Hideki Matsui isn't playing again

By John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle, 6/1/2011, 11:46am

When it comes to Hideki Matsui, Bob Geren remains Mr. Positive though the DH is out of the lineup again today.

While Geren went on record saying he expects the slumping Matsui to start hitting again, Matsui suggested it's easier to snap out of a slump when you're playing every day.

"He's just struggling a little bit right now," Geren said. "We've got a couple other guys swinging the bat pretty good. I fully expect him to be fine and contribute and have a nice second half."

Geren left Matsui out of the lineup for the second straight day against a right-handed pitcher, which says it all. In the past, he'd sit mostly against lefties.

Furthermore, Matsui's sitting out against his old team, the Yankees.

"Regardless of whether it's your former team or not, the desire of any player is to play and contribute every day," Matsui said moments ago through his interpreter. "Realistically, I haven't been contributing. It's disappointing, but that's the reality."

His average is .222. In May, it was .197.

"No. 1 would be not being able to help your team," Matsui said. "Not being able to play is kind of a difficult situation. In order to get out of your slump, you have to play. But if you're not playing, it's hard to get out of it."

What about Geren's hopes for a better second half?

"I'd like to believe so, too, but in order for the results to come, you have to play, and if you play, then the results will dictate where that will go," Matsui said.

And if he doesn't produce? Could Matsui be facing the end of the line?

"As far as the decision to stay on the team, that's not really my decision," he said. "As far as results, that applies really to any player. In order to play and stay, you've got to be productive."

For now, Matsui is feeling better about his swings.

"Practice has been pretty good," he said. "I've been swinging pretty well. In the games, there are times the results are there and times they're not."

Geren said Matsui is working with hitting coach Gerald Perry but added he doesn't see anything wrong mechanically with Matsui, who turns 37 this month.

Today's DH is David DeJesus. Yesterday's was Josh Willingham. So Geren basically is using the DH to get all four outfielders into the lineup.

Here's today's: CF Crisp, DH DeJesus, 1B Jackson, LF Willingham, RF Sweeney, C Suzuki, 2B Ellis, 3B Kouzmanoff, SS Pennington. Gonzalez on the hill.

A's skid against Yankees reaches 10 games

By Tom Green / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Entering their three-game series with the Yankees, the A's were riding high. They were winners of four straight and five of their last six. Their pitchers were dealing and their offense was finally clicking.

That all changed when the Yankees came through town, culminating in Wednesday's series finale, which resulted in a 4-2 loss that gave the Yankees the series sweep and their 10th straight win against the A's, and took away any momentum the A's built over the last week.

"They're not that much superior," A's manager Bob Geren said. "No team should really have that kind of dominance over another one in our league. Our pitching's too good. It's just more of a coincidence."

This series, however, the A's pitching wasn't good enough. Geren insisted there is no mental block hindering his pitchers from succeeding against the Yankees, but the trio of Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson and Gio Gonzalez couldn't keep New York's potent lineup in check and combined to allow 18 runs. On Wednesday, it was Gonzalez who fell victim to the long ball.

Gonzalez, coming off a stellar May in which he posted a 3-0 record and a 1.67 ERA, looked like he found a way to limit New York's offense -- until he couldn't find the strike zone in the fourth inning. Gonzalez threw 16 of his 26 pitches out of the zone in the frame, and the Yankees took advantage.

"Gio was victimized that inning," Geren said. "Obviously, it was self-inflicted, throwing six balls in a row at one point."

After giving up a leadoff single to Alex Rodriguez, Gonzalez threw six straight balls, including a walk to Robinson Cano, before Nick Swisher made the A's southpaw pay.

Swisher squared up to bunt on the first two pitches he saw from Gonzalez, but both missed the strike zone. Following a brief visit to the mound from catcher Kurt Suzuki and pitching coach Ron Romanick, Gonzalez served up a 2-0 pitch to Swisher, who launched the Yankees' Major League-leading 83rd home run of the season to left field to put New York ahead for good.

"It felt good, especially in that situation," Swisher said. "We have runners at first and second, nobody out, and I thought I was told to lay one down. When it got to 2-0 and the pitching coach came out, I went over to [third-base coach Rob Thomson] and said, 'What do you want me to do right here?' He said, 'I want you to let it loose.' So I did."

"When he took the bat off his shoulder, it was like a green light," Gonzalez said. "It felt like [he was going to swing away] as soon as he stood up there and he took the bat off his shoulder instead of squaring up. They were talking about going out there and throwing a strike, but that's exactly what you don't want to do with a 2-0 fastball."

For Swisher, who was part of the trade that brought Gonzalez to Oakland in 2008, it was his fourth home run of the season and proved to be the difference in the game.

"Again, this is a good lineup," Gonzalez said. "We did our best to minimize damage. All it took was one mistake pitch, that's all it was."

Gonzalez (5-3, 2.49 ERA) labored through 6 1/3 innings despite getting something his fellow starters didn't get the previous two games -- an early lead.

After the Yankees put one run on the board in the opening frame, the A's answered with a two-run first for their only lead of the series. David DeJesus reached on a one-out double before Josh Willingham hit his 10th round-tripper of the year on a 3-1 pitch from A.J. Burnett.

That's all the A's would get off Burnett (6-3, 3.86 ERA) on the day, as the lefty limited Oakland to one hit over the next six innings before handing it over to the bullpen duo of Joba Chamberlain and Mariano Rivera.

"Burnett didn't seem really that tough," Geren said. "I just don't think we swung the bats that well."

The A's had a chance against Chamberlain in the eighth, but had nothing to show for it. After Cliff Pennington struck out, bringing an end to his nine-game hitting streak, Coco Crisp and DeJesus reached on back-to-back singles. Conor Jackson hit a line drive right back to Chamberlain, who flipped the ball to first for the double play. The double play ended the frame, as well as any chance the A's had to salvage the series before embarking on a 10-game road trip.

"Just one of those breaks," Gonzalez said. "We get a little streak going and it stops right there. When it's going their way, it's going their way."

Crisp, Willingham need help in All-Star voting

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A's outfielders Coco Crisp and Josh Willingham could be sleeper picks for this year's All-Star Game as they continue to emerge offensively while the club makes a push to stay within contention in the American League West.

They can't get there on their own, though. Both are in need of votes in order to be included in the top picks among their positions.

Fans can cast their votes for starters up to 25 times at MLB.com and all 30 club sites -- online or via your mobile device -- using the 2011 All-Star Game MLB.com Ballot Sponsored by Sprint until June 30 at 8:59 p.m. PT.

Starting rosters will be announced during the 2011 All-Star Game Selection Show on TBS on July 3. Baseball fans around the world will then be able to select the final player on each team via the 2011 All-Star Game Final Vote Sponsored by Sprint.

And the voting doesn't end there. Fans will have the opportunity to participate in the official voting for the Ted Williams Most Valuable Player Award presented by Chevrolet at the Midsummer Classic via the 2011 All-Star Game MVP Vote Sponsored by Sprint.

The All-Star Game, to be played in Phoenix on July 12, will be televised nationally by FOX and around the world by Major League Baseball International. ESPN Radio will provide exclusive national radio play-by-play, while MLB.com will offer extensive online coverage.

Though Crisp and Willingham endured slow starts, much like the rest of the A's starting nine, they've given the A's flashes of speed and power, respectively, while representing lineup mainstays and providing consistent defense.

Slumping Matsui out of A's lineup again

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Hideki Matsui surely faced similar struggles in his previous eight Major League seasons. Never before, though, have they resulted in as many days out of the lineup.

Oakland's struggling designated hitter was out of the starting lineup for the second straight day on Wednesday and the third time in the past four days, despite the past two games coming against right-handers.

"In order to get out of a slump, you have to play," Matsui said through translator Roger Kahlon.

But manager Bob Geren elected to utilize David DeJesus in the DH spot for the club's series finale against the Yankees, marking just the fourth time in DeJesus' career that he's started there. Ryan Sweeney, meanwhile, got the start in right field.

"[Matsui] has been struggling a little bit right now, and we've got a couple other guys swinging the bats pretty good, so we're just putting other guys in," Geren said. "We fully expect him to be fine and contribute and have a nice second half, but right now Sweeney's swinging the bat well, and [Josh] Willingham's driving the ball, and DeJesus has been one of our best hitters."

Matsui is hitting .222 on the season with a .667 OPS, and he collected 14 hits in 71 at-bats in the month of May. However, he's a .300 career hitter in June and also boasts a .307 average in the month of July, and Wednesday he noted an improved comfort level with the bat.

"Practice has been pretty good," he said. "I've been feeling pretty good there, swinging pretty well. Obviously in the games, there have been times where results are there and times when it hasn't been, but personally I feel like things aren't bad."

But it's a game of production, and if Matsui doesn't provide that when given the opportunity, his playing time will continue to be in jeopardy. Geren doesn't see that being an issue, though.

"I don't see anything mechanically wrong right now," the A's skipper said. "Everybody has hot and cold spells. I don't think there are really any issues. I fully expect him to be fine. I'll get him back in there, and I believe he'll have a good year for us, I really do."

Said Matsui: "I'd like to believe so, too, but in order for the results to come, you have to play, and if you play, then the results will dictate where that will go."

Beane does not want Suzuki blocking plate

OAKLAND -- A's general manager Billy Beane is making sure catcher Kurt Suzuki is never placed in a position that could result in a similar fate that the Giants' Buster Posey suffered.

Beane, Suzuki said, has relayed orders to his backstop not to block the plate when there's a chance of a big collision. The decision comes less than a week after Posey endured a season-ending ankle injury following a crushing hit at the plate from the Marlins' Scott Cousins.

"Don't put yourself in a vulnerable position, basically," Suzuki explained. "He said keep doing what I'm doing, but obviously, don't stand in front of the plate. I'm not a guy that does anyway. We talked about how I'm not the biggest guy."

Suzuki is listed as 5-foot-11 at just 196 pounds -- reason enough to stay out of harm's way. But according to ESPN.com, Beane represents the first executive to give such orders.

"He said, 'Hey, what happened to Posey was awful, kind of a freak accident, but basically I don't want that to happen to you. I don't want you to have surgery and to be out the rest of the year,'" Suzuki said. "He was just reiterating that."

Since Posey's incident, much has been made of whether Major League Baseball should consider new rules to better protect catchers from such collisions at the plate. Don't count Suzuki among those supporters, though.

"As a catcher, you have to be ready for plays like that," he said. "It's part of the game and part of playing the game hard. I personally don't think they should change the rules, because I think it would make it too tough.

"The game's been played this way for a number of years, and when you're catching you know you're putting the gear on and there's a possibility of getting run over. That's the chance you take."

A's skip Moscoso in rotation for Boston trip

OAKLAND -- The A's current plan is to utilize Thursday's off-day as a chance to have their Nos. 1 and 2 starters take the mound at Fenway Park in Boston this weekend.

The club announced its probable pitchers for the three-game set against the Red Sox on Wednesday, with Josh Outman getting the nod for Friday's opener, and Trevor Cahill and Brett Anderson pitching in the final two games.

That means Guillermo Moscoso's fifth spot will be skipped, and he likely won't go again until Tuesday in Baltimore. But in making that decision, the A's were able to fit Anderson into the mix at Fenway, where he's 2-0 with a 2.65 ERA in three career starts.

Cohn: A's vaunted pitchers flunk Yankees test

By LOWELL COHN, THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

The A's starting pitchers gave up 18 runs to the Yankees in their just-completed three-game series — the Yankees won 4-2 on Wednesday. Eighteen runs is a load or an avalanche or an assault — choose your image. It's a very bad thing for three starters to give up 18 runs.

Especially A's starters. The Oakland staff is the best in the major leagues. Well, it was before Wednesday's game, the A's with an earned run average of 2.99, quite a fancy earned run average. Let's just say the A's allegedly have the best pitching staff in baseball. In the real world, they don't.

Reality is the New York Yankees coming to Oakland with all those superstars and with that history and with that name — Yankees. Reality is the A's sending out their young starters to make their stand. Reality is the A's pitchers not making their stand, not even close.

It was a bad failure because pitching is all the A's have. When the pitching doesn't work, the A's generally lose — they got swept by the Yankees in their series and have lost 10 in a row to the Yankees.

"They are not that much superior," A's manager Bob Geren said of the superior Yankees. "Obviously, they scored more runs than we did and beat us. No team should have that kind of dominance over another one. Our pitching is too good. It's more like a coincidence."

It's no coincidence. In spite of what Geren preaches, in spite of what his pitchers tell themselves, Trevor Cahill and Brett Anderson and Gio Gonzalez are not ready for the Yankees and they are not ready for the moment of crisis. In the series, they showed awe verging on fear, and they could not produce.

Pitchers are not ready until they have been tested. Usually — not always — the test involves pitching in the postseason in serious games for grownups. The A's pitchers are promising but untested. Revealing the truth about A's pitching is what this series was about.

Someone asked Geren if his pitchers folded in the presence of the Yankees.

"I talked to each one of them about going after these guys and pitching them like anybody else," Geren said. "None of them have any kind of respect for them different from anybody else. (The Yankees') offense obviously is solid, especially in the middle. But it's not necessarily that much stronger for a three-game series than a lot of other good teams. So, I really don't think so. We just have to break that string of them beating us, but I don't think it's a mental thing. I really don't."

"These (pitchers) are all tough. Gio, he doesn't care who he's throwing against. He just lets it rip. (Kurt) Suzuki calling the game lets it rip. Cahill is the most calm guy, nothing seems to bother him. And Anderson's the classic baseball-rat-type pitcher. He gets the ball and throws his game."

The key moment of Wednesday's game — the decider — came in the fourth inning and it was all on Gonzalez, the toughest of the A's starters. Alex Rodriguez singled. Gonzalez walked Robinson Cano on four pitches. Nick Swisher squared to bunt twice but each pitch was out of the strike zone and he took two balls. That's six balls in a row.

Pitching coach Ron Romanick hurried to the mound and told Gonzalez he needed to throw a strike. Here is Gonzalez on what happened next: "When he (Swisher) took the bat off his shoulder, it was a green light. I threw it right down the middle for him. It's a lesson in life. You learn from it and you move forward. They were talking about, 'Just go out there and throw a strike,' but it's exactly what you don't want to do with a 2-0 fastball, throw a strike. And he did exactly what he was supposed to do with a 2-0 fastball down the middle. The way he set up I could have easily thrown something else."

Whatever he was supposed to do, Gonzalez did wrong. He grooved a fastball and Swisher blasted it out of the park and now the score was 4-2 New York and now the game was over. Gonzalez had faced the defining moment and let the moment define him. The series defined the A's starting pitchers. They have some definitions to change.

Gutierrez: A's need to play Matsui, test his slump

Paul Gutierrez, CSNCalifornia.com

OAKLAND - His arrival was heralded for the impact he would have both in the batter's box, and at the box office.

Hideki Matsui has done neither. Truly, Godzilla has played more like Godzuki for Oakland through the first two months of the season and the A's have a tough decision to make on their high-profile designated hitter who signed a one-year, \$4.25-million free-agent deal in December.

The decision, though, should be easy - play him every day. Let him attempt to break *himself* out of his spirit-sapping slump. And if he can't do it before, say, interleague play starts up again (he's not going to play the outfield in National League parks, anyway), cut him. But using him for spot, pinch-hitting duty is doing no one any good. Least of all, the 24 other players in the offensively-challenged A's clubhouse.

Even the small army of Japanese media that chronicle Matsui's every move has an impending sense of doom regarding their national baseball-playing treasure, as if they are indeed witnessing the last days of Matsui-mania.

He batted .197 in May and, despite his first major league team, the New York Yankees, throwing a pair of right-handers at the A's on Tuesday and Wednesday, the left-handed hitting Matsui was tethered to the bench.

"He's struggling a little bit right now," A's manager Bob Geren said before the Yankees beat the A's, 4-2, to complete a three-game sweep and defeat Oakland for the 10th straight time. "We've got a couple of other guys swinging the bat pretty good. So I'm just putting some other guys in."

"I fully expect him to be fine and contribute and have a fine second half."

Wait, what? Second half? The A's have only played 57 games. Surely this could not have been code for "Matsui's not playing again until Game 82," right?

There's a certain regal, majestic air that envelops Matsui you have to experience to fully comprehend. And it only grows when he acknowledges his struggles, even second-hand through an interpreter.

That old chicken-or-the-egg argument translates when it comes to Matsui.

"In order to get out of a slump, you have to play," Matsui said, through Roger Kahlon. "But if you're not playing, then it's hard to get out of it."

It's a vicious, seemingly endless cycle. One exacerbated by his struggles in the season's second month. He batted a putrid .190 in May over the past two years.

But when the calendar turns, and the weather warms, so too does his bat. He is a career .300 hitter in June, .307 in July.

Wednesday, on the first day of June, Matsui was in the on-deck circle with two out in the ninth inning, no one on base and Kurt Suzuki at the plate. Had Suzuki reached against Yankees closer Mariano Rivera, Matsui would have represented the tying run.

But Suzuki popped out to second base and Matsui trudged slowly back to the dugout and made the lonely journey back to the Oakland clubhouse, where he packed his bag for the A's 10-game trip to Boston, Baltimore and Chicago.

For the season, Matsui is batting .222, 68 points below his major league career batting average entering the season, with just three homers and 19 RBI.

"Everybody has hot and cold spells," Geren said. "I fully expect him to be fine (and) have a good year for us. I really do."

But to have a good year, he has to break out of his slump. And to break out of his slump, he has to play. Unless, of course, he's done. The A's have to run him out there every day, just to make sure, one way or the other.

"As far as staying on the team, that's not really my decision," Matsui said. "But as far as results and in order to play in this league, you have to be productive."

Chicken, meet egg. And vice-versa.

Ratto: Taking A's temperature after two months

Ray Ratto, CSNBayArea.com

OAKLAND -- It is June 1, the season is a third done (well, .345679012345679 over, if math be told), and we can make a clear and unambiguous statement about the Athletics.

They will go as far as Billy Beane will take them at the trade deadline.

And since for the A's the trade deadline is too late, we can start anticipating some cross-armed toe-tapping as we wait for the A's to repair themselves at the first pit stop.

Oh, we all enjoyed the Bob Geren-Brian Fuentes psychological thriller for the comedy it provided, but the A's will not be defined by that unless the A's are a lot more trivial than we think they are.

In fact they are more of what we thought they were than when the season started -- a team loaded with starting pitchers, a bullpen that if healthy can stand with any of them (and since they aren't ever healthy, we can give them the incomplete they deserve), without a lot of offense and a nerve-wracking defense.

The defense has been worse than we thought, the hitting has been nearly hopeless, and the starters have been exceptional. Indeed, any hopes and dreams they harbor now are based on the fact that neither Texas nor Los Angeles has made a move yet, either. They stand 2½ game out of the division lead, 3½ out of the wild card.

And nobody looks at this and sees a breakout coming. Of course, they could all be wrong about this, but that isn't the way to bet.

In fact, it looks far more likely that this season will be defined every bit as much by what Beane does to improve it at the same time that every other serious general manager is looking to improve his team, rather than by him being a seller surrounded by buyers.

In other words, unless the A's decide to fall out of the race entirely in the next month, this will not be a Matt Holliday kind of year.

Beane has typically done his bargain hunting in the offseason, being bold when those around him are not. It's been a while since he had to throw elbows to clear himself some space below the rim, but if these are the A's we will be presented with on June 15 (after all, the real trade deadline moves closer and closer to July 1 rather than July 31), he is going to have to make the kind of choice he usually asks another GMs to make, namely:

The morning, or the future.

Beane is not normally swayed by public sentiment. In fact, if you got him drunk enough, he'd likely tell you he hates public sentiment because he knows lots more than the public does. Which ought to be the case, frankly -- either that, or we all have a piece of his salary and club share coming to us.

But this was the team with expectations. This was the team that was going to Giant-size its way into the tournament. Pitching pitching pitching, and a burst of late-season moves to patch up those plumbing and wiring.

Well, we're heading toward the patching part of the season, or at least the part where the phone calls start getting plentiful. And somewhere in the next 61 days, sooner rather than later, Beane will have to decide whether this team can be fortified to make a run, will have to wait yet another year, or be stripped for and sold for parts.

There won't be a press release on it. It'll be a mental calculation he shares with owner John Fisher, front man Lew Wolff, aide de camp David Forst and, maybe, Geren as well. And we'll know it based as much on what he doesn't do as much as what he does.

So while you think this is a manager's disconnect story, it isn't, not really. This is about the moment Billy Beane either has his Eureka moment, in which he makes the deal that says he is going for the gold, or his Yreka moment, in which he does nothing at all and decides that 2012 is a more fortuitous time for a playoff run.

And that's if the Mayans don't kick everyone in the hinder first

Yankees sweep A's aside with relative ease, winning 4-2 on Wednesday

Sam McPherson, examiner.com

(OAKLAND) -- The Oakland Athletics had the New York Yankees right where they wanted them this week.

At the Coliseum, with the A's three best starting pitchers lined up against three guys from New York not named C.C. Sabathia ...

And Oakland still got its hat handed to it. Easily.

Today was the A's best shot, as they actually had a lead in this game for a few innings before former Oakland star Nick Swisher hit a three-run home run off a kid he was traded for in January 2008 -- Gio Gonzalez -- to basically win the game for the Yankees, 4-2.

The Mighty Pinstripes just must laugh at facing the A's now, as the memorable first-round playoff battles of 2000 and 2001 are distant memory, a decade old -- when the small-market Athletics could stand toe-to-toe with the mighty big-market bad boys from New York.

Now, it's easy pickings for the bad boys in blue, who have won 24 of the past 28 meetings between the two teams dating back to the beginning of the 2008 season.

Advertisement

So once again, the A's realize they have a long way to go before they're ready to compete for the ultimate prize in baseball: in three games against the Yankees, Oakland gave up 19 runs, scored only five and lost all three contests while only leading for two of the 27 innings played between the teams this week.

The A's gave the Yankees their best shot, and they came up way short -- as usual.

Now, Oakland faces a ten-game road trip through Boston, Baltimore and Chicago, and they start the task three games under .500 as well.

In fact, the A's play 16 of their next 25 games away from Oakland.

Last year, the team entered June with a 28-24 record and in first place by a game. They finished that month with a 38-41 overall record -- ten games out of first place.

If they're not careful, the same thing could happen to them in 2011.

Hopefully, this Yankees series wasn't a preview of what is to come in June for the A's, because if it is, Oakland is once again going to be an afterthought in both the Bay Area and the national baseball scene.

Yankees take the series, sweep the A's

Malaika Bobino, Oakland Post, 6/2/2011

Oakland, CA – It's not often you see the A's pitching struggle throughout a series. Today another starter was defeated by the bats of the New York Yankees. But this time there was a bit more control in the first frame compared to the last two outings.

The Yankees gave "high-fives" along with smiles as they embraced each other on the field to complete the sweep of the series. The 4-2 victory over Oakland gave them their fourth consecutive win of a nine game road trip. New York has now won ten straight games against the A's.

"They're not that much superior," manager Bob Geren said. "Obviously, they scored more runs than we did and beat us." "But no team should have that kind of dominance over another one in our league." "Our pitching is good, it's just more of a coincidence."

Gio Gonzalez almost got through the first without too much damage but he allowed two doubles to both Derek Jeter and Alex Rodriguez who brought in the Yankees first run. But the A's responded immediately with a double from David DeJesus and two-run homer from Josh Willingham that gave Oakland a 2-1 lead, a first in this series.

However, despite coming off a month where Gonzalez earned a 3-0 record he lost sight of the strike zone in the fourth inning. New York's offense once again took control and dominated at the plate. Gio walked two and Nick Swisher hit a three-run homer to left field to give the Yankees a 4-2 lead. At that point Oakland found themselves back to playing catch up.

"Again, this is a good lineup," Gonzalez said. "We did our best to minimize damage but all it took was one mistake pitch, that's all it was."

A few misfortunes for the A's, Rodriguez single in the fourth would've been an out had Conor Jackson gained more control of the ball that was hit toward first. Coco Crisp tripled with two outs in the fifth but was left stranded. Bottom of the eighth both Crisp and David hit back-to-back singles with one out but Jackson hit a sharp line drive to Joba Chamberlain who threw to first for the double play.

"That's the game of baseball," said Alex Rodriguez. "Sometimes those things are unexplainable, hard to believe because they've got a really good team."

A.J. Burnett didn't present his best stuff when Willingham connected early but he settled down to pound the strike zone. Burnett allowed three hits over seven innings and two of those were in the first. Than Chamberlain and Mariano Rivera both threw scoreless innings each giving no opportunity for Oakland's offense to rally back.

Three of the A's best pitchers were no match for the Yankees power hitting and combined they gave up 18 runs. One mistake proved costly throughout the series and moving forward will require to getting back to their best. Oakland will look ahead to their upcoming ten-game road trip that begins tomorrow facing Boston, Baltimore and Chicago.

A's lose to Yankees for 10th consecutive time

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — A.J. Burnett settled down after an early homer to snap an 11-start winless streak on the road, and Nick Swisher homered against his former team to help the New York Yankees beat the Oakland Athletics for the 10th straight time, 4-2 on Wednesday.

Derek Jeter got his 2,984th hit and Alex Rodriguez drove in a run for the Yankees, who have their longest winning streak against the A's since winning 14 in a row from 1956-57.

Josh Willingham hit a two-run home run and Gio Gonzalez (5-3) took his first loss since April for Oakland, which was swept by the Yankees in a three-game series and has lost 23 of the last 26 meetings against New York.

Burnett (6-3) had not won a game away from Yankee Stadium since last July in Cleveland, going 0-5 with a 5.64 ERA in his previous 11 road starts. He looked to be on his way to another rough day when Willingham homered in the first inning, but didn't allow anything else.

Burnett gave up two runs and three hits in seven innings for the fourth straight strong start from New York's rotation, giving the Yankees a season-long four-game win streak. Burnett allowed only one hit after the first inning — a two-out triple by Coco Crisp in the fifth.

Joba Chamberlain pitched a scoreless eighth, snaring a line drive to start an inning-ending double play. Mariano Rivera finished for his 14th save in 17 chances and first since May 10. It was Rivera's 1,002nd career appearance, tying Goose Gossage for 14th place all-time.

The A's came into the series on a four-game winning streak with their top three starters lined up to face the powerful Yankees. But New York battered Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson and Gonzalez for 18 runs in the three-game sweep.

Gonzalez allowed four runs five hits and four walks in 6 1-3 innings.

For the third straight day, the A's fell behind before even coming to bat. After allowing two-run homers in the first inning the past two days, Oakland managed to keep the deficit at one this time: Jeter led off with a double — the third straight game he has opened with a hit — and scored on Rodriguez's two-out double.

That was the first hit allowed by Gonzalez in 22 at-bats with runners in scoring position and two outs.

Oakland responded in the bottom half with a two-run homer of its own. Willingham's 10th of the season came with two outs and David DeJesus on second, giving the A's a 2-1 lead.

That ended a stretch of 60 straight innings that Oakland did not hold a lead at the end of a frame against the Yankees.

The lead lasted only until the fourth inning, when Swisher connected for a three-run shot off Gonzalez, one of the players the A's acquired when they dealt Swisher to the Chicago White Sox three years ago.

Notes: Yankees LHP CC Sabathia threw out the ceremonial first pitch as part of a ceremony to honor the Little League program in his hometown of Vallejo, Calif. ... Yankees RHP Phil Hughes (shoulder inflammation) threw about 50 pitches in a bullpen session the game and is scheduled to face hitters Saturday in Anaheim. ... Oakland DH Hideki Matsui, who is hitting just .222, got his second straight day off against a RHP. ... Oakland reliever Joey Devine has not allowed an earned run in 33 consecutive innings dating to May 23, 2008.

Oakland gets thumped twice by New York as Beane tells Suzuki to avoid collisions

Sam McPherson, examiner.com

Evidently, Oakland Athletics general manager Billy Beane is fine with asking his team to step aside and let the other guys score.

And that's just what the New York Yankees did on Monday and Tuesday at the Overstock.com Coliseum as they beat the A's twice, pretty easily: 5-0 on Monday and 10-3 on Tuesday.

The joke is on Beane, however, as clearly he's not done much to help this team win in the past five years under Lew Wolff's ownership.

And these two games against the Yankees continue to illustrate the wide gap between the better teams in the league and the A's: since the start of the 2008 season, New York is 23-4 against Oakland.

Both losses were distressing to Oakland fans for different reasons: on Monday, the A's got whitewashed by a starting pitcher who hadn't thrown a shutout since July 2006, and on Tuesday, Oakland lefty Brett Anderson had the worst start of his career (nine earned runs) that also ended the A's streak of 28 straight games where the Oakland starter allowed no more than four earned runs -- the longest streak by the team since 1981.

So when Beane tells catcher Kurt Suzuki to avoid collisions like the one that injured San Francisco Giants catcher Buster Posey last week, it's kind of amusing -- or not so, depending on your demeanor.

A very unscientific poll on ESPN.com showed 72% of 20,000+ readers disagreeing with Beane's instruction to Suzuki, and that seems to be about right: collisions at the plate are unfortunate, but letting a guy score a run without trying to stop him defeats the whole purpose of playing the game.

Yet it fits the A's mentality under Wolff's ownership as well: ho-hum, who cares if we win?

Well, a lot of people do, and with the third game against the Yankees today (pending a probable rain delay), Oakland needs to win -- they have a ten-game road trip up next thanks to a U2 concert at the Coliseum, and these 11 games are going to go a long way towards deciding the A's 2011 fate.

Right now, Oakland is 27-29 and 2.5 games out of first place. If they fall any more in the standings in the next two weeks, everyone might be able to write the team off for the rest of the season.

So Suzuki might want to stand in the way of Derek Jeter today if the A's want to win -- and if he gets injured, well, that's just part of the game, but at least A's fans will know he cared enough to block the plate in the first place.

And sometimes, that's all you can ask of the Oakland players: show us you want to win.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Rosales homer short of cycle: Cats win

By Mike Morris / Sacramento River Cats

Despite being down four runs early, the Sacramento River Cats found a way to get through the rain delayed afternoon start Wednesday, winning 7-4 against visiting Salt Lake.

The River Cats allowed two runs in the first inning and another two in the second. Bees left-fielder Tyson Auer singled early, scoring on a throwing error by starting pitcher Carlos Hernandez. Former River Cat Jeff Baisley scored the second run for the Bees on a sacrifice bunt by first baseman Efran Navarro.

Similar to the first inning, the Bees used single (this time Gil Velazquez) to start the second. Salt Lake's Cole Armstrong followed Velazquez with a double to score Velazquez. Armstrong scored on a single by Auer to extend the Salt Lake lead to four runs, making things bleak for Sacramento. Luckily for the River Cats, the bats came out as soon as the sun did, scoring a run in four of the next six innings while the Bees were unable to put a run on the board from the third inning on.

Sacramento catcher Anthony Recker hit a home run in the second to bring his team within three. However, in the fourth inning the River Cats scored four runs, giving them the 5-4 lead.

There were two unfamiliar faces on the Raley Field infield Wednesday. Second baseman Scott Sizemore, who was acquired in a trade that sent Oakland A's pitcher David Purcey to Detroit, was playing his second home game while Oakland A's third baseman Adam Rosales is rehabbing an ankle injury.

Both players playing a key role in the game.

After Recker flew out to center field, the River Cats hit three consecutive doubles (Michael Taylor, Eric Sogard and Jai Miller) in the fourth. The doubles didn't stop there as Rosales, who got to Sacramento on Wednesday morning, hit the fourth double of the inning, bringing in Miller to tie the game.

"I'm still trying to be completely comfortable at the plate," said Rosales, who finished a home run short of the cycle. "I just wanted to get out there and play. It was nice to get a game under my belt."

Rosales singled in the first inning, hit an RBI double in the fourth and tripled in the sixth. The third baseman, who also stole a base in the first inning, was removed after the seventh inning as part of his scheduled rehab, leaving him a home run shy of completing the first cycle in River Cats history.

Sizemore, the other new face, had the go-ahead RBI to finish the fourth inning, as he brought in Shane Peterson on a sacrifice fly. That wouldn't be the last run for Sacramento, as they scored one run in the sixth and seventh. The Bees, on the other hand, went scoreless through the last seven innings.

Despite the rough start, River Cats left-hander Carlos Hernandez won his second game of the season and is now 2-0 with a 3.44 ERA. Hernandez struck out seven, walked none and allowed just six hits through 6.0 innings.

The River Cats look to get much of the same from left-hander Lenny Dinardo, who scheduled to start Thursday. He'll face right-hander Eric Junge, who is 3-3 on the year with a 3.68 ERA.

RockHounds lose in extra innings

Staff Reports, Midland Reporter-Telegram

TULSA -- A ninth-inning rally by the Midland RockHounds turned out to be all for naught as the Tulsa Drillers scored an unearned run in the bottom of the 10th, pulling out a 7-6 victory at ONEOK Field on Wednesday.

The RockHounds rallied from a 5-1 deficit after three innings and scored three runs in the top of the ninth to tie it at 6-6. However, with two outs in the bottom of the 10th, Neil Wagner took over on the mound for Jon Meloan, who had just walked Drillers second baseman Thomas Field.

Wagner promptly walked center fielder Tim Wheeler, then with runners on first and second, a fielding error on Midland right fielder Adam Heether allowed Wheeler to score the winning run from second.

But it was unlikely this game would even head to an extra inning entering the ninth. Second baseman Tyler Ladendorf led off the frame by drawing a walk and then scored courtesy of a two-run homer by center fielder Jermaine Mitchell -- his seventh of the season -- pulling the RockHounds within a run, 7-6.

Grant Green and Stephen Parker then hit back-to-back singles. Green scored from third on a sacrifice fly by first baseman Michael Spina -- his second of the night -- tied the game.

The RockHounds fell behind early after Tulsa scored one in the first and added three more in the second. Only two of the Drillers 10 hits went for extra bases with Ben Paulsen and James Cesario each hitting doubles. Paulsen finished the game with three RBI, while Cesario had two.

Mitchell, Spina and designated hitter Matt Sulentic each had two RBI for the RockHounds.

Game 2 of a four-game series is set for 7:05 p.m. today at ONEOK Field in Tulsa.

Blaze Shut Out Ports; Losing Streak Continues

The Ports returned home to face the Bakersfield Blaze, only to be shut out to start the series. The Blaze took a 1-0 victory while the Ports struggled to bring base runners.

Ports starting pitcher A.J. Griffin and J.C. Sulbaran held each other's teams scoreless until the top of the 6th, when the Blaze's right-fielder Stephen Hunt hit a home run out to right field, scoring the game's only run.

Griffin went 6 innings, giving up 6 hits and the lone run, before Connor Hoehn took the mound for Stockton and retired three in a row. Ben Hornbeck then came in to pitch in the 8th. Blaze third baseman Alex Buchholz managed a single, but was caught stealing second.

But the Ports defense would not make up for the lack of runs. Plenty of opportunity came their way throughout the game. In the bottom of the 5th, third baseman Michael Gilmartin tripled. The Ports would go on to strike out twice in a row, Gilmartin being thrown out on the second strikeout to end the inning.

In the 6th, second baseman Conner Crumbliss walked and left-fielder Myrio Richard singled with one out. Unfortunately, the inning would end, once again, on back-to-back strikeouts.

The Blaze brought in Mace Thurman to pitch after Sulbaran went 6 innings, allowing 4 hits. The Ports had no more luck facing Thurman than they did Sulbaran, managing two singles in the 8th, but failing to score.

Doug Salinas pitched the final inning for the Blaze, retiring the Ports in order, ending the game without a run for Stockton, despite a total of 6 hits.

Rob Gilliam takes the mound for the Ports tomorrow as the Ports look to end a four-game losing skid. First pitch is scheduled for 7:05 p.m.

Cal notes: Choice adds pop to Ports

By Chris Martinez / Special to MLB.com

Michael Choice received the biggest assignment of his brief baseball career when the Oakland Athletics placed him on their Class A Advanced club in Stockton to start the 2011 season. Undaunted at the task of skipping a level in his full-season debut, the 21-year-old outfielder has responded by leading the Ports with 11 home runs and 34 RBIs in 48 games.

The A's selected Choice 10th overall last year in hopes that he would be an offensive leader, just as his early 2011 numbers have proven. Choice says he's making the adjustments necessary for playing every day, like figuring out what kind of approach to take into every at-bat. He also took lessons from fall instructional ball last year on the basics of playing outfield in the pros.

"I feel like so far this year I've been a lot better and more successful than I was in Short Season," said Choice, who hit .284 with seven homers in 27 Northwest League games last season.

Choice recognizes the everyday grind of a full season as his biggest hurdle, though he identified it more as a mental issue than a physical one.

"[It's] knowing that you have 90 more games to go and you have this road trip ahead of you," he said. "It wears you down more than if you take it day by day."

Choice's hitting philosophy also requires mental focus.

"I feel you have to be a hitter before you worry about the power," he said. "If you are a power hitter, and you focus on getting base hits, the power will come."

He's also working on reducing his strikeouts while increasing his walks, which requires the same kind of focus he applies to power hitting.

"[It's about] seeing pitches and not going up there and swinging at everything. That will cut down strikeouts and help produce more walks."

It's all part of working toward the biggest goal for Choice in 2011 -- consistency through his first full professional season.

"You have your really good days and your really bad days," he said. "Whatever you do on your really good days, you want to make sure you do over again and just try to be consistent with it."

Choice set the tone for his season with an invitation to Oakland's big league camp at Spring Training, observing what it takes to make it in the Major Leagues.

"It was a great experience to be up there with those guys and see how they carry themselves every day," he said.

In brief

Better late: Modesto 1B **Kiel Roling** earned **Player of the Week honors** for a blistering performance in which he clubbed five homers and 14 RBIs while scoring 15 runs. Roling is batting .422 (19-for-45) since May 21 and has hit well since arriving in Modesto on May 2. He's there to anchor first base since **Mike Zuanich** went on the disabled list May 29 with a hand injury.

Welcome to the Cal League: High Desert RHP **Brandon Maurer** earned a promotion from Class A Clinton in mid-May. This week he earned **Pitcher of the Week honors** after tossing eight shutout innings May 25 against Modesto. Maurer struck out nine without walking a batter, but he did not earn his first win at the A Advanced level until May 30 when he pitched 7 2/3 innings against Lancaster. He allowed five runs in that contest, his highest run total since April 26 with Clinton.

Rancho's rally: Nine runs is a big day for any baseball team. It's too bad that Lancaster's big day was squashed by Rancho Cucamonga's offensive onslaught on May 25. The Quakes put up a franchise-record run total, capped by an 11-run rally in the ninth inning, and Angelo Songco hit for the cycle in a **25-9 win over the JetHawks**. Every starter but leadoff man Jake

Lemmerman had at least two RBIs. The contest featured seven home runs between the two teams, who combined for 32 hits.

Loons "Walk Off" With a 5-4 Win

By Jon Versteeg, Burlington Bees

MIDLAND, MI-The Great Lakes Loons (28-25) scored two runs in the ninth inning to beat the Burlington Bees (37-17) 5-4 before 4,504 fans at Dow Diamond on Wednesday night.

The Bees scored a single run in the first inning. 3B Tony Thompson (1-3) singled and moved to second base on a single by DH Josh Whitaker (1-5). An RBI single by LF Douglas Landaeta (4-4) scored Thompson for a 1-0 lead.

The Loons scored three runs in the fourth inning. RF Jon Garcia (2-4) doubled and moved to third base on a single by SS Christian Lara (1-2). He scored on a wild pitch. Great Lakes scored two more runs in the inning: one on a wild pitch and another on a throwing error to take a 3-1 lead.

Burlington scored a run in the fifth inning. CF Jose Rivero (1-4) hit a single and moved to third base on a single by C John Nester (1-4). An RBI groundout by RF Royce Consigli (1-4) scored Rivero to make it 3-2.

The Bees got the first two hitters aboard in the eighth inning. 2B Nino Leyja (0-2) was hit by a pitch and Thompson walked. Landaeta singled to load the bases before SS Yordy Cabrera (1-4) lined a double down the right field line to score both men and give Burlington a 4-3 lead.

In the ninth inning Garcia hit a one-out single against RHP Zach Thornton (2-2). SS Christian Lara (1-2) walked and C Michael Pericht (2-3) singled Garcia across home plate. 3B Jesse Bosnick (1-4) hit a single to score Lara for the winning run.

The Bees and Loons finish their series on Thursday night at 6:05 p.m. RHP Tyler Vail (0-2, 5.54) starts for Burlington while RHP Brett Montgomery (0-1, 5.06) takes the mound for Great Lakes.