

Guillermo Moscoso leads Oakland A's past Seattle Mariners 2-0

By Ben Enos, Oakland Tribune

If Guillermo Moscoso is pitching with his job on the line, the pressure sure doesn't seem to be affecting him.

The A's right-hander continued his run of solid performances with seven shutout innings against the Seattle Mariners on Wednesday afternoon. And this time, his offense scraped together just enough support to help the A's avoid a three-game sweep with a 2-0 victory in front of 19,491 fans at O.co Coliseum.

With Tyson Ross continuing his rehab in the minor leagues, a decision on what to do with the rotation when Ross returns to the majors looms for the A's after the All-Star break. But, for now, Moscoso is doing his best to take care of the things he can control.

It doesn't get much better than what he did against the Mariners, allowing two singles and a walk en route to his first win since May 29.

"I've just got to focus on today and not think about if it's going to be my last start," he said. " ... I gave the team a chance to win. That's what they're looking for."

In one respect, Moscoso earned the win by pitching against conventional wisdom. With warm temperatures providing plenty of opportunity for fly balls to carry, Moscoso got 13 of his 21 outs in the air.

He recorded the final out of his afternoon to end the seventh, using his 109th pitch to strike out Carlos Peguero. Moscoso responded with an emphatic fist pump as he walked off the mound.

Despite carrying just a 3-4 record, Moscoso owns a 2.16 ERA. He has allowed two or fewer earned runs in six of his eight starts.

"Every time out, he's been that strong," A's closer Andrew Bailey said. "I wouldn't say today was his best, but it was definitely one of them. Everything he's asked to do, he's done, whether it's the bullpen or starting."

"We've got a lot of guys coming back here, and it's going to be a tough decision, and that's kind of what you want. You want to make the front office have tough decisions. That means everyone's pitching well and playing good baseball."

The razor-thin margin of error that Moscoso has become accustomed to dealing with was present again Wednesday, as the A's mustered just two runs against Mariners starter Jason Vargas (6-6). Oakland scored just five runs in the three-game series.

Moscoso got an early lead, thanks to a solo home run in the first by Scott Sizemore.

"I feel like if we score first, most of the time we're going to have a chance to win the game," Sizemore said. "That certainly happened today. Moscoso shut them down."

Sizemore provided the other run, as well, lining a two-out single to center in the fifth that scored Cliff Pennington.

That run came with a little help, as a throwing error by shortstop Brendan Ryan turned Pennington's infield single into an extra base. Vargas balked Pennington to third. After Jemile Weeks grounded out, Sizemore delivered.

No Seattle runner reached second base against Moscoso, Joey Devine or Bailey, who pitched a scoreless ninth to earn his eighth save one night after allowing two runs and taking the loss in extra innings.

Oakland A's update: Outfielder Josh Willingham, reliever Grant Balfour expected back from disabled list

By Ben Enos, Oakland Tribune

Good health may not be far off for the A's heading into a four-game series in Texas.

Outfielder Josh Willingham and setup man Grant Balfour are both on track to come off the 15-day disabled list before the A's take the field Thursday in Arlington.

Willingham has been eligible to come off the D.L. since July 3 but has stayed cautious with his comeback from a strained left Achilles. Manager Bob Melvin and Willingham said they are optimistic for a Thursday return based on Willingham's workouts the past few days.

"If he makes the plane flight successfully to Texas and doesn't hurt himself tonight eating dinner or whatever, I feel like there's a good chance he'll play (Thursday)," Melvin said after Wednesday's 2-0 win over Seattle.

Melvin said Balfour (strained right oblique) will be activated Thursday, the first day he's eligible to come off the D.L. He pitched an inning for Triple-A Sacramento on Tuesday in his final rehab appearance and allowed a run.

Making a rehab start for Sacramento in Fresno on Tuesday, starting pitcher Tyson Ross (strained left oblique) lasted just 3 1/3 innings and allowed seven hits and four runs. Pitch count became an issue, and the right-hander had to come out in the fourth after throwing 71 pitches.

"He struggled a little, as far as the results go," Melvin said. "One, it's about getting his pitch count up. Two, it's the (innings), as well. I think it was three-plus, so he only got up the fourth time. We'd like to see him get up somewhere around six times."

Melvin said Ross is scheduled to make another rehab appearance, likely in five days. With Sacramento off that day, the start could come at Single-A Stockton.

While most players stopped short of saying the Texas series is a must-win, the opportunity to regain some traction in the American League West wasn't lost on the A's as they departed Wednesday.

"It's pretty big. If we could sweep them, we're four games back in it," closer Andrew Bailey said. "Hopefully we go in there, play good baseball and come out of it looking good for the second half."

Wednesday's shutout lowered the A's team ERA to an A.L.-best 3.05.

Chin Music: Getaway day for the A's

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, July 6th, 2011 at 11:25 am

Ben Enos filling in for Joe Stiglich today

Another warm one on tap here in Oakland, and the bags were already being lined up outside in preparation for the trip to Texas tonight.

First off, here are today's lineups:

A's – Weeks 2B, Sizemore 3B, Crisp CF, Matsui DH, Carter 1B, Jackson LF, DeJesus RF, Suzuki C, Pennington SS. Moscoso P.

Mariners – Ichiro RF, Ryan SS, Kennedy DH, Smoak 1B, Ackley 2B, Peguero LF, Gutierrez CF, Bard C, Figgins 3B. Vargas P.

Not a ton to report in terms of pregame news today. Manager Bob Melvin said Grant Balfour is on track to come off the disabled list tomorrow in Texas as scheduled. The right-hander threw for Sacramento last night in his final rehab appearance and allowed a run on two hits and a walk in one inning.

Tyson Ross made the start for the Rivercats last night and didn't have the cleanest outing. He threw just 3 1/3 innings, allowed seven hits and four earned runs. He struck out four and walked two. Melvin said the biggest thing was Ross got his pitch count up, and the right-hander had to come out in the fourth inning after 71 pitches. Melvin also said that Ross will throw another rehab appearance, likely in five days. With the way the minor-league calendars look, I'm guessing that'll be in Stockton.

Final piece of injury news is Melvin said OF Josh Willingham had another positive day yesterday and that the team hopes to have an answer on his status in Texas. Nothing definitive on that yet.

Guillermo Moscoso makes case, shuts down Seattle

Steve Kroner, Chronicle Staff Writer

-- Fairly soon after the All-Star break, the A's will have to make a decision or two regarding the composition of their rotation.

After Guillermo Moscoso's virtuoso performance in Wednesday's 2-0 victory over Seattle at the Coliseum, you have to figure he has earned at least another start or two.

The 27-year-old right-hander held the Mariners to two hits over seven innings and did not allow a runner past first base. He struck out five and walked one, lowering his ERA to 2.16.

With Tyson Ross probably ready to come off the disabled list at the end of next week, Moscoso realized he might become the odd man out of the rotation. Moscoso tried not to carry that thought with him to the mound.

Moscoso said he had "to get focused (on) today, not think about if this is going to be (his) last start."

In his past four starts, Moscoso has given up a grand total of one earned run and 11 hits over 24 2/3 innings. Not bad for someone whose only big-league experience before this season consisted of 11 relief appearances for Texas (10 in 2009, one last year).

The A's acquired him in January, sending minor-league pitcher Ryan Kelly to the Rangers. Oakland called up Moscoso on May 24, and he made his first big-league start that night, tossing six shutout innings in the A's 6-1 win at Anaheim.

Moscoso signed with the Tigers as an undrafted free agent in 2003. As someone who has spent the bulk of his career pitching for Lakeland, Oneonta and Oklahoma City, he appreciates simply being in the bigs.

"I don't care about any role," he said, "starter, reliever, whatever. I'm just trying to stay here as long as I can."

In his seven innings against the Mariners, Moscoso recorded only three groundball outs. There aren't too many major-league starters who thrive by the flyball, but Moscoso believes he can.

"All my career, I've had a high flyball rate," he said. "But I get my outs. That's the important thing."

Said A's manager Bob Melvin of Moscoso: "His fastball plays a little bit better than the velocity. He's able to elevate, get you to pop up - off his changeup, off his breaking ball.

"He'll slow you down with those two pitches and then run a fastball; whether it's 90, 91 (mph), it plays like 93, 94. He gets a lot of popups."

Rich Harden gets the start tonight as the A's open a four-game series in Texas. In his first appearance of the season, he held Arizona to two runs over six innings in a 5-4 win Friday.

Harden has been on the disabled list 10 times in his career, so it's a stretch to think he's etched in stone in the rotation.

Add one other variable to the rotation mix: Lefty Brett Anderson (elbow) still has a chance to pitch this season, though almost assuredly not until August.

In any event, Moscoso made his bid to remain a starter with his seven superb innings.

"We've got a lot of guys coming back here," reliever Andrew Bailey said, "and it's going to be a tough decision - and that's kind of what you want. You want to make the front office have tough decisions.

"That means everyone's pitching well."

Bailey also pitched well Wednesday, throwing a perfect ninth for his eighth save.

Guillermo Moscoso

Guillermo Moscoso is 3-4 with a 2.16 ERA for the A's this season. A look at his past four starts:

Opp.	Result	IP	H	ER	BB	SO
Sea.	W, 2-0	7	2	0	1	5
Fla.	L, 3-0	6	4	1	0	8
Phi.	L, 1-0	7	2	0	3	2
S.F.	W, 4-2	4 2/3	3	0	3	1

A's new guy, Scott Sizemore, can hit

Steve Kroner, Chronicle Staff Writer

-- Like **Guillermo Moscoso**, **Scott Sizemore** has spent barely a month with the A's. And like Moscoso, Sizemore played a rather large role in Oakland's 2-0 win over Seattle on Wednesday.

Sizemore took **Jason Vargas** (6-6) deep to left in the first inning for his third homer of the season. In the fifth, Sizemore delivered a two-out RBI single.

Oakland acquired Sizemore from the Tigers for pitcher **David Purcey** on May 27. After a stint in Triple-A, Sizemore joined the A's on June 6 and has become the regular third baseman.

And unlike most of his teammates, Sizemore has hit well in the past month. He's 26-for-80 (.325) with the A's.

That slide: The key moment in the A's 4-2 loss Tuesday night came in the 10th inning. On what might have been an inning-ending 4-6-3 double play, shortstop **Cliff Pennington's** throw to first was wild, enabling **Franklin Gutierrez** to score the go-ahead run.

Ichiro Suzuki's slide was well to the right-field side of second base, which could have been ruled an automatic double play. Neither Pennington nor manager **Bob Melvin** disputed umpire **Jim Reynolds'** non-call.

After seeing replays Tuesday night, Melvin had some second thoughts.

"Had I known where (Suzuki) was," Melvin said Wednesday morning, "I probably would have gone out and argued it. But from here, you can't tell - and there wasn't any argument out there on the field to alert me to maybe something happened along those lines."

Briefly: The A's expect to activate reliever **Grant Balfour** (oblique) from the disabled list today. ... Melvin said there's a good chance outfielder **Josh Willingham** (Achilles tendon) also could come off the DL for the series opener in Texas.

Leading off

Top 3: Ichiro Suzuki went 0-for-4 on Wednesday, leaving him with 270 career hits against Oakland. The only two men with more: Rod Carew (282) and George Brett (271).

Drumbeat: Second thoughts on Ichiro's slide and today's lineup

From Steve Kroner at the Coliseum 7/6/2011, 12:00pm

The key moment in Tuesday night's 4-2 loss to the Mariners came in the 10th inning. On a possible 4-6-3 double play that would have ended the inning, Ichiro Suzuki slid well to the right-field side of second base as Cliff Pennington tried to make the relay throw to first. Pennington's throw was wild, allowing Franklin Gutierrez to score the go-ahead run.

Neither Pennington nor manager Bob Melvin argued umpire Jim Reynolds' non-call. In his pregame news conference this morning, Melvin admitted to second thoughts after seeing the replay.

"Had I known where (Suzuki) was," Melvin said, "I probably would have gone out and argued it. But from here, you can't tell -- and there wasn't any argument out there on the field to alert me to maybe something happened along those lines."

"Now looking at it, what they're looking at is if he can reach over and touch second base. It's not just his line, but can his farthest reach touch the bag? That's probably the debatable one, depending on how long his arms are. I haven't measured his arms, so I really don't know. Had I known where he was, I probably would have at least gone out there and argued. Whether or not that would have changed anything, I don't know."

Melvin's lineup today against lefty Jason Vargas: Weeks, 2B; Sizemore, 3B; Crisp, CF; Matsui, DH; Carter, 1B; Jackson, LF; DeJesus, RF; Suzuki, C; Pennington, SS.

A few odds and ends: Melvin expects the A's will activate reliever Grant Balfour (oblique) tomorrow. ... Radio play-by-play man Ken Korach will miss the series in Texas; Steve Bitker of KCBS will join Vince Cotroneo in the booth. ... Ichiro has 270 career hits against Oakland. The only men with more: Rod Carew (282) and George Brett (271).

Moscoso, A's handle business against M's

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Looking backward or forward is never a priority on Bob Melvin's to-do list.

The A's manager prefers to stay in the present and fervently thrives on such a mindset.

So on Wednesday morning, when asked about the significance of his club's upcoming four-game set in Texas beginning the next day, Melvin didn't shy away from acknowledging the opportunity to gain ground on the Rangers. But he also didn't ignore the task at hand.

"We have to beat these guys first," he said.

Melvin, of course, was referring to a Mariners team that had taken two of the first three contests of the home series. The third, aided by another tremendous effort from right-hander Guillermo Moscoso, went to the A's via a 2-0 win -- marking just the type of victory needed for a dose of momentum.

"There's a theme, obviously, here," Melvin said. "We play these types of games a lot, as does the club on the other side, so looking at it, we knew runs were probably going to be at a premium. You can't say must-win, but this was a game we had to win today."

Moscoso made sure of such a result by offering the A's seven scoreless innings that brought about just two hits with one walk and five strikeouts. In doing so, the right-hander lowered his ERA to 2.16 and has surrendered just one earned run over his last 24 2/3 innings.

How those numbers translate into the rotation puzzle after the All-Star break is unclear. Right-hander Tyson Ross (oblique) is expected to return in some capacity at that time, meaning Moscoso's job could be in jeopardy, not because of performance, but rather the numbers game.

The scenario has yet to enter Moscoso's mind, though. And if it has, he's done a fine job of pretending otherwise, as he's let his arm do the talking.

"I just got to do my best, keep doing my best and try to stay long, deep in the game and give the team a chance to win," he said. "I don't care, any role, if I'm starting, relieving, whatever. I'm just trying to stay here as long as I can."

Moscoso handcuffed the Mariners in convincing fashion, allowing just three batters to reach base and throwing first-pitch strikes to 17 of the 24 hitters he faced.

"He just pitched with his fastball and we weren't squaring it up very well," Seattle's Adam Kennedy said. "He has a little life on it, it's a little harder than what it looks, but we just didn't put a lot of pressure on him."

Run support has come at a premium for Moscoso, who received none in four of his last five starts entering the series finale. But another productive day from Scott Sizemore changed that tune.

The A's third baseman launched a first-pitch homer off Seattle's Jason Vargas in the first to put the A's on top, 1-0, his third long ball of the season. Then it was his RBI single in the fifth that extended Oakland's lead to two.

"I normally don't swing first pitch of the game, I like to track one," Sizemore said. "But for whatever reason when I stepped in the box today I just felt good. I felt like I almost had a tunnel to where my sweet spot was and he happened to put it there and I just connected on it."

Sizemore, acquired in a trade at the end of May, has quietly provided an offensive boost in the No. 2 hole and is hitting .325 with the A's overall, including .409 (9-for-22) over his last six games.

"It's a pretty fulfilling feeling," he said, "but I just got to go out there and do the same thing tomorrow and hopefully be the spark plug tomorrow."

"It's the complementary guys on teams like this that really help you win," Melvin said. "We need contributions throughout our rotation, throughout the bullpen, throughout the lineup, and we can't rely on just a couple guys. We rely on everybody, and that's why guys like Sizemore and Moscoso show up so big."

Righty Joey Devine pitched a perfect eighth before Andrew Bailey recorded his eighth save of the season with a scoreless ninth.

"We're a team, obviously, that's going to play a lot of close games," Bailey said. "That's just the way we're built. Hopefully we start coming out on top like these close games today."

Their first chance to continue that trend comes on Thursday in Texas, where they'll look to narrow in on the .500 mark.

"It would be nice to go in there and win some games and go into the break with a good feeling," Melvin said. "It is a team that's ahead of us. We're not trying to look at the standings too much, but it is a team that was in the World Series last year. If we can't get up to play those games, something's wrong with us."

A's looking to gain ground on division-rival Rangers

By Jon Star / MLB.com

The A's entered the final week prior to the All-Star break with the opportunity to make up ground in the American League West. With a three-game series against the Mariners followed by a four-game set with the Rangers, the last-place A's recognized that if there was any time to gain a measure of momentum, it is this weekend. With a 4-2 record against the first-place Rangers this season, the A's could have the formula to trim their 7 1/2-game deficit.

"It's definitely an opportunity, but so [was the Seattle series]. Whether it's Seattle, whether it's the Angels, whether it's Texas, you know you're going to lose or gain a game regardless on that particular team. All those teams are ahead of us, so they're all equally important," said A's manager Bob Melvin.

On Thursday, Melvin hands the ball to Rich Harden, who will make his second start of the season after returning last Friday from a strained right lat muscle. He will also be facing the club he pitched for in 2010, having posted a 5-5 record, 5.58 ERA and 75 strikeouts with the Rangers.

Harden had a very positive showing in his season debut on July 1 against the D-backs. The right-hander earned the victory after surrendering two earned runs on four hits with six strikeouts over six innings.

Harden will square off against Derek Holland, who is looking to erase memories of an awful start his last time out. The left-hander gave up five earned runs and walked two in only two-thirds of an inning on July 2 against the Marlins. He has dropped four of his last five decisions, and has allowed 21 earned runs in 26 1/3 innings during that span. Ron Washington quickly squashed any notion of Holland pitching for his job, but the Rangers skipper acknowledged that Thursday is a very important start for Holland.

"It's important for Derek. Notwithstanding what we want, it's got to be what Derek wants," Washington said. "What Derek wants to go out there and accomplish. It's important for him. He's been sitting on the taste that he has been having to carry around for four days."

Holland took a tough-luck loss the last time he faced Oakland -- a seven-inning effort in which he gave up two earned runs and struck out four on May 2.

Athletics: Weeks wins Rookie of the Month

Jemile Weeks earned AL Rookie of the Month honors for June, the league announced on Tuesday. Weeks, who made his Major League debut on June 7, burst onto the scene by going 3-for-3 in his second game on June 8 on his way to a .309 average (25-for-81) and six RBI for the month. Weeks tallied seven extra-base hits and six stolen bases in 21 games. His

hot hitting has continued into July as Weeks is off to a .375 (9-for-24) start and has hit safely in five of six games this month.

Rangers: Young racking up hits

Michael Young has recorded three consecutive three-hit games, giving him 13 three-hit games for the season. He is now tied with the Cubs' Starlin Castro and the Mets' Jose Reyes for the second-most three-hit games in baseball this season, trailing only the Red Sox's Adrian Gonzalez, who has 15. Young enters Thursday's action with 33 multihit games, ranking him fourth in the AL. He has tallied 12 multihit games since June 1 (32 games).

- Nelson Cruz is starting to heat up after hitting .229 combined in May and June. The outfielder is hitting .400 (10-for-25) this month with two home runs and 12 RBIs, including his six-RBI night on July 1 against the Marlins and his three-RBI night on Wednesday. He has four multihit games this month and his five runs scored in July match his total from June 9-30.

Worth noting

- The Rangers have stolen a base in six straight games, going 10-for-12 in that span. The Rangers' 85 steals this season ties the Mets for the most in baseball. Their 78.7 percent success rate (85-for-108) is the best in the AL and fourth in the Majors.

Willingham likely to return on Thursday

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Following his club's 2-0 win over the Mariners on Wednesday, A's manager Bob Melvin delivered more good news by hinting that Josh Willingham is likely to make his long-awaited return from the disabled list on Thursday.

"If he doesn't hurt himself tonight eating dinner or whatever, I feel like there's a good chance he'll play [Thursday]," the skipper said.

The timing couldn't be better for the A's, who are set to begin a four-game set on Thursday in Texas, where warm weather and a hitter-friendly ballpark could make for the perfect ingredients for Willingham's power bat.

The A's outfielder, who has been sidelined by a nagging Achilles injury, leads the team with 10 home runs, and his presence has been missed in a struggling lineup that scored just five runs in the three-game series against Seattle.

Oakland is not expected to officially announce the move, or any other corresponding transaction, until Thursday.

Balfour to be activated before Thursday's game

OAKLAND -- The A's will kick off a pivotal four-game road set in Texas beginning on Thursday with right-hander Grant Balfour in tow.

Manager Bob Melvin confirmed on Wednesday morning that the plan is to activate the reliever from the disabled list at that time, at which point righty Graham Godfrey is likely to be optioned.

Balfour, nursing a strained right oblique back to health, tossed one inning for Triple-A Sacramento in a rehab appearance on Tuesday, giving up one run on two hits with a walk while throwing 23 pitches, 12 for strikes.

"I'm ready to go," he said. "I'd go today if I could."

Balfour has held opponents to a .198 batting average this season, including .136 with runners in scoring position, and was tied for second among American League relievers in wins (four) at the time of his injury.

Ross slated for another rehab appearance

OAKLAND -- A's manager Bob Melvin said right-hander Tyson Ross, who has struggled in two rehab outings with Triple-A Sacramento, will make at least one more Minor League appearance before being considered ready for a return to big league action.

Ross (left oblique) tossed 3 1/3 innings for the River Cats in Fresno on Tuesday, utilizing 71 pitches along the way. He gave up four runs on seven hits, including a home run, and walked two with four strikeouts.

"He's struggling as far as results go," Melvin said. "One, it's about getting his pitch counts up there, and also about getting more ups and downs in the game."

There is no indication whether Ross will slide back into Oakland's rotation or be placed in the bullpen upon his return after the All-Star break, though Melvin said relief work is a definite option for the righty.

Worth noting

With a 4-2 loss in the 10th inning on Tuesday, the A's fell to 5-10 in extra-inning games, which is the worst record in the American League.

Gutierrez: Homestand leaves questions for A's

Paul Gutierrez, CSNCalifornia.com

OAKLAND -- *This* was supposed to be when and where the A's made a stand. When they would make some hay in the American League West.

A nine-game homestand against the floundering Florida Marlins, the overachieving Arizona Diamondbacks and the smoke-and-mirrors Seattle Mariners?

A 6-3 mark would have been acceptable for the A's. Going 7-2 would have been ideal.

But 4-5, after Wednesday's 2-0 defeat of the Mariners? Meh.

The A's entered the homestand in last place, six games behind Texas. Now, they're 7 1/2 behind the Rangers and Los Angeles Angels.

But at the risk of going all Al Pacino in "The Godfather: Part III," here it goes: Just when you thought you were out, Oakland pulls you back in...with performances like these.

Guillermo Moscoso's tour de force against the Mariners -- seven shutout innings of two-hit ball -- is the exact reason why it's too soon to write the A's off, as tempting and, well, as logical as it might be for the more frustrated among you. That, and the fact the A's have four games coming up in Texas in which a bountiful trip would set the A's up quite nicely after the All-Star break, thank you very much.

Of course, we've been saying these things about the 10-games-under-.500 A's since Day 1. So why should it be any different today?

Let's focus on Moscoso, who admitted he entered the day thinking it might be his last start for the A's for a long while.

There's a numbers crunch again about to hit the A's rotation, as soon as Tyson Ross is deemed healthy enough to return from his rehab starts.

But while Ross has a 13.50 ERA in two such outings with Triple-A Sacramento, Moscoso has allowed one earned run in his last 24 2/3 innings of big league ball, dating to June 18.

Against the Mariners, Moscoso not only earned his first victory since May 29 - he was 0-4 in June despite an ERA of 2.25 in the month - the right-hander also lowered his season ERA from 2.51 to 2.16.

"It means he pitched great," said an understated Bob Melvin, the A's interim manager. "He was up for the performance."

You think? The man was pitching for his livelihood, and it might not matter.

I asked Moscoso if he still thought there was a possibility of his being sent back to toil with the River Cats.

"I don't want to think about that," he answered, in Spanish. "I have to just keep doing my job and they (management) will make the decision."

Honestly, the choice was made harder for the front office by Moscoso.

Outside of All-Star left-hander Gio Gonzalez, Moscoso has been the A's most consistent starter of late, even with his 0-4 June.

Consider: Moscoso has a 1.96 ERA in his last seven outings, including six starts.

So who goes if and when Ross returns? Rich Harden and Brandon McCarthy are fresh off the disabled list and both pitched well in their respective returns. Trevor Cahill is going nowhere.

"I'm just doing my best," Moscoso said, "trying to stay here as long as I can."

The choice will be just as hard as it might be unpopular.

Then again, the A's have not done anything easy this season. You think they're in it, they lose 13 of 14, including 10 in a row. You think they're toast, they peel off six victories in a row, and they close out a once-promising homestand with a feel-good win against Seattle and neither the Rangers nor Angels seem willing to run and hide.

Which is why I asked Melvin if there was a certain bittersweet feeling to salvaging the series finale against the Mariners but going just 4-5 on the final homestand of the first half.

"Once you're past what's happened," Melvin said, "you try not to reflect...you try to move forward."

At least, until the A's are either in the race, or throwing up the Green and Gold towel and preparing for next season. Both options are on the table. Still.

A's plan to activate Balfour for Texas series

Paul Gutierrez, CSNCalifornia.com

OAKLAND - The A's plan on activating right-handed reliever Grant Balfour from the disabled list Thursday, in time for Oakland's four-game series at Texas, interim manager Bob Melvin confirmed in his pre-game meeting with the media Wednesday morning.

Balfour, on the D.L. since June 22 with a strained right oblique, pitched one inning of rehab relief for triple-A Sacramento Tuesday night. The right-hander gave up one run on two hits and a walk against Fresno.

Of course, the A's need to make a corresponding roster move to make room for Balfour, who is 4-1 with two saves and a 2.48 ERA in 33 appearances. The likely candidate to be sent back to the River Cats would seemingly be right-hander "Moonlight" Graham Godfrey.

Also, the A's are holding out hope on activating clean-up hitter Josh Willingham (strained left Achilles' tendon) in Texas, which would mean the A's would have to send down another pitcher as they are currently carrying 13 pitchers on the 25-man roster.

And, another move will have to be made if and when Tyson Ross (strained left oblique) returns. The right-hander has been roughed up in a pair of rehab starts with Sacramento to the tune of a 13.50 ERA in two starts. Melvin said Ross has at least one more rehab start remaining.

A's defeat Seattle, 2-0

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Guillermo Moscoso was more worried about shutting down Seattle than his status in Oakland's rotation.

Moscoso made a strong case to keep his spot by allowing two hits in seven innings and Scott Sizemore homered to help the Athletics salvage the finale of a three-game series with a 2-0 victory over the Mariners on Wednesday.

"Like I said before the game. I have to be focused today and not worry about if this would be my last start," Moscoso said. "I just had to stay focused and make quality pitches today and give the team a chance to win. That's what we're looking for."

Sizemore hit a solo homer in the second inning and added an RBI single in the fifth against Jason Vargas (6-6) to give Moscoso (3-4) more than enough support to win for the first time since May 29.

Moscoso won his first two starts before going 0-4 in June, despite posting a 2.25 ERA. Despite the solid performance, Moscoso's spot in Oakland's rotation is in jeopardy with Tyson Ross expected to come off the disabled list following the All-Star break.

"I just have to do my best, keep doing my best and try to stay deep into games and give the team a chance to win," he said. "Any role, starter or reliever. I'm just trying to stay here as long as I can."

Moscoso made a strong case to remain in Oakland's starting five, allowing only singles to Dustin Ackley in the second inning and Adam Kennedy in the seventh. Moscoso struck out five, walked one and got 13 of his outs in play on flyballs.

Moscoso has allowed just one earned run in his past 24 2-3 innings, lowering his ERA to 2.16.

"Every time out he's been that strong," closer Andrew Bailey said. "I wouldn't say today is his best but it's definitely one of them. Everything he's asked to do he's done, whether it's bullpen or start. Each and every time out he's made the most of the opportunity. It's going to be a tough decision. That's what you want. You want the front office to have to make a tough decision. That means you're pitching well and playing good baseball."

Joey Devine pitched a perfect eighth and Bailey finished for his eighth save in nine chances.

The Mariners managed just two hits and had their three-game winning streak snapped.

"We just didn't put a lot of pressure on him," DH Adam Kennedy said of Moscoso. "You look at his numbers and he's a flyball pitcher but we should be able to make adjustments. We just didn't get it done today."

The A's lost the first two games between the AL's lowest-scoring teams in predictably tight fashion. Seattle won the opener 2-1 behind a strong start by Michael Pineda and then won 4-2 Tuesday with help from a throwing error by Oakland shortstop Cliff Pennington in the 10th inning.

Sizemore got the A's started in the first inning when he turned on a first-pitch fastball from Vargas and drove it into the left-field seats for his third homer of the season to make it 1-0.

Oakland added a second run in the fifth inning when Pennington reached second on an infield single and throwing error by shortstop Brendan Ryan. He moved to third on a balk and scored on Sizemore's two-out hit to center field.

Vargas allowed two runs and five hits in eight innings for his fourth complete game in his past seven starts.

"Sizemore got him a couple times but Jason threw the ball well again, gave us every opportunity to win the ballgame," manager Eric Wedge said. "You can't say enough about how consistent he's been. He was efficient all day long."

NOTES: The Mariners matched a season-worst with three errors, having also done it April 6 at Texas. ... Oakland reliever Grant Balfour (right oblique) felt good after a one-inning rehab assignment Tuesday and will be activated from the DL on Thursday. ... OF Josh Willingham also might be ready to return Thursday from a strained left Achilles. ... The Mariners called up infielder Kyle Seager from Triple-A Tacoma after the game and designated catcher Jose Yopez for assignment.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

First-place River Cats lose ninth in row

By Kyle Tucker / Sacramento River Cats

Sacramento failed to take advantage of an early lead and lost its franchise-record ninth consecutive game Wednesday night in Fresno. With the comeback 7-6 victory, the Grizzlies swept the River Cats for the first time in the history of the Highway 99 rivalry.

After jumping ahead in front of Fresno in the first inning on a three-run homer from Kevin Kouzmanoff, the River Cats allowed the Grizzlies to creep back into the ballgame.

Jai Miller added another run in the second with his 17th homer, a solo shot deep over the center field wall.

Fresno answered with two runs in the second and another in the third. Conor Gillaspie hit a solo homer to lead off the inning, his fifth of the season. The Grizzlies added one more run on a force out that scored Thomas Neal, cutting Sacramento's lead in half.

Leading off the third inning, Edgar Gonzalez blasted a solo shot to center and the momentum began to turn in Fresno's favor.

That was all Sacramento left-hander Carlos Hernandez would allow as he left the game after 5.0 innings with the one-run lead.

Adrian Cardenas continued to swing a hot bat, going 4-for-4 and boosted his average to .320. Cardenas scored on a sacrifice fly off the bat of Anthony Recker in the sixth inning that extended the River Cats' lead to 5-3.

Sacramento reliever Yadel Marti worked 2.0 innings and allowed one run in the seventh inning. Justin Christian singled in Max Ramirez on an infield hit to shortstop.

The eighth inning was the beginning of the end for the River Cats as they let another lead slip away on a pair of solo home runs. San Francisco's top prospect Brandon Belt blasted a towering home run to center field off Neil Wagner. Gillaspie then tied the game by belting his second home run of the night and the fifth solo home run of the game.

The final blow for Sacramento was a Ramirez double over Miller's head in deep center that scored Thomas Neal and brought Fresno all the way back to takeover the lead.

Fresno reliever Marc Kroon shut down the River Cats in the ninth as Fresno completed the sweep and sent Sacramento to Las Vegas with just a 4.0-game lead.

The River Cats have watched their PCL South division lead dwindle away from 9.0 to 4.0 games in the matter of a week. Sacramento will have a golden opportunity to regain the ground they have given up this weekend in Las Vegas.

Sacramento will give Lenny DiNardo (2-5, 8.74) the ball Thursday night at Cashman Field. The 51s will counter with right-hander Scott Richmond (5-6, 6.31). Tune in to hear the action live on Talk 650 KSTE with Johnny Doskow.

Stockton Slugs Out Series Sweep In High Desert

ADELANTO, Calif. - For the second straight night, the Stockton Ports reached their season-high hit total. For the fifth straight night, Michael Choice hit a home run. These seem to be the winning combinations these days as the Ports won their 21st game in their last 22 and earned their fifth series sweep in the last six series, beating the High Desert Mavericks on Wednesday night by a final of 13-6. The Ports are now 20-4 against South Division opponents.

After belting six home runs on Tuesday night, the Ports were back at it again on Wednesday. Michael Gilmartin got the offensive surge started with a solo blast to left in the 3rd to give the Ports a 1-0 advantage.

High Desert countered with a trio of runs in the bottom half of the inning. After back-to-back singles and a walk loaded the bases to open the frame, the Mavericks got their first run in on an RBI groundout to first from Denny Almonte to tie the game at 1-1. The Mavs took their first lead two batters later on a sac-fly from Mario Martinez and added to it on a two-out single from Shaver Hansen to take a 3-1 lead after the 3rd.

Stockton, however, would tee off in the 4th inning on High Desert starter Yoervis Medina (1-8). With one out, Petey Paramore, Ryan Lipkin, Mitch LeVier, Leonardo Gil, and Gilmartin all singled. During the sequence to Gilmartin, Mavericks catcher Billy Marcoe dropped a pop-up in foul ground, an error that allowed Gilmartin's at-bat to continue. Gilmartin drove in the third run of the inning with his single, and two batters later Choice launched a three-run homer to left-center to give the Ports a 7-3 advantage.

Medina would go four innings and take the loss after allowing seven runs (three earned) on 11 hits while striking out three.

Ports starter Rob Gilliam (10-4), after striking out the side in order in the 4th, would struggle to make it through the 5th. With one out, High Desert came through with five straight singles, yielding three runs to make it a 7-6 ballgame. Hansen's was the fifth single in a row and he was thrown out in a rundown between first and second for the second out of the inning. Gilliam then struck out Gabriel Noriega to end the frame.

Gilliam would earn his league-leading 10th win, going five innings and allowing six runs on 10 hits while striking out seven. All 10 hits he allowed were singles.

In the 6th, the Ports turned the ball over to Mike Benacka, and with one out he found himself in a jam. Daniel Carroll walked and James Jones doubled to left, putting runners at second and third. Benacka would bear down, though, and record back-to-back strikeouts of Almonte and Matt Cerione to end the inning. After Jones' double, Ports pitching would combine to retire 11 of the next 12 batters to end the game.

Benacka pitched two scoreless innings, allowing one hit while striking out three.

Nursing a 7-6 lead, the Ports got themselves a tremendous amount of insurance in the 8th. The Ports started the inning with seven straight hits. The first three came off Mavs reliever Stephen Kahn-three singles to load the bases. Kahn was then lifted for Jason Markovitz who came in to face Gilmartin. On the first pitch from Markovitz, Gilmartin hit a grand slam to dead center field to make it an 11-6 game. Stockton, after going back-to-back twice on Tuesday, would do it again on Wednesday as Dusty Coleman followed with a solo shot to left-center to make it a 12-6 advantage. After giving up two more singles, Markovitz was pulled and Jose Jimenez came on and struck out his first three batters to end the inning.

Three of the five runs that came across in the 8th were charged to Kahn, while the other two were charged to Markovitz.

The Ports added another run in the 9th on a solo shot from Gil off Jimenez for a 13-6 lead. It was the only run Jimenez allowed in his two innings of work.

In the series, the Ports hit 14 home runs, while the Mavericks were held homer-less. Gilmartin finished the night 4-for-6 with two home runs and 6 RBI. Choice went 3-for-5 with a home run and 3 RBI, and Gil from the nine-hole went 3-for-5 with 2 RBI. Coleman (2-for-5) and Ryan Lipkin (3-for-4) each had an RBI on the night.

Following their series sweep of High Desert, the Ports return home on Thursday for a four-game set with the Modesto Nuts. In a battle of left-handers, Jake Brown (1-3, 6.65 ERA) will toe the rubber for Stockton, opposed by Edwar Cabrera (0-0, 2.84 ERA) for Modesto. First pitch is set for 7:05 p.m. PDT.

Bees Win in Thrilling Fashion in the 9th

By Jon Versteeg, Burlington Bees

BURLINGTON, IA- The Burlington Bees (6-7) got a grand slam home run from DH Josh Whitaker to erase a 3-0 deficit and walk off with a 4-3 win over the Quad Cities River Bandits (5-8) before 677 fans at Community Field on Wednesday night in the opening game of a three-game series.

The River Bandits scored one run in the second inning on a solo home run by 1B Jonathan Rodriguez (1-3) for a 1-0 lead.

Quad Cities LHP Ryan Copeland allowed one hit, an A.J. Kirby-Jones (1-4) single with two outs in the fourth inning. He walked CF Jose Crisotomo (0-2) to lead off the inning and recorded 10 straight outs until the Kirby-Jones single in the fourth inning. He finished with one hit and one walk, striking out six over seven innings.

RHP Josh Bowman was equally outstanding for the Bees. He allowed one earned run on two hits, walking just one and striking out five.

LF Colin Walsh (1-3) hit a two-run double in the ninth inning to make it 3-0 River Bandits.

In the bottom of ninth inning, Crisotomo walked and went to second base on a single by PH Tony Thompson (1-1), who was batting for 2B Ryan Pineda (1-3). Kirby-Jones reached base on an error before Whitaker smacked a pitch over the center field wall off of RHP Aidan Lucas (1-2) for the 4-3 win.

RHP Drew Tyson (4-2) pitched two innings to get the win for Burlington.

The Bees continue their three-game series with the Quad Cities River Bandits on Thursday night at 6:30 p.m. It's "Thirsty Thursday" with 2 for 3.00 Pepsi specials and 2 for \$4.50 deals on select beers. RHP Seth Blair (4-3, 4.34) gets the start for Quad Cities against RHP Blake Hassebrock (4-4, 1.89) for Burlington. Pre-game coverage begins tomorrow at 6:10 p.m. on Newsradio 1490 KBUR and online at www.gobees.com.

Oberacker and Macias Key Vermont Win

By Paul Stanfield / Vermont Lake Monsters

BROOKLYN, NY --- Chad Oberacker went 3-for-4 with a pair of RBI singles and Jose Macias allowed just one unearned run over six innings to lead the Vermont Lake Monsters to a 5-2 victory over the Brooklyn Cyclones in New York-Penn League action Wednesday night at MCU Park.

Vermont jumped out to a 1-0 lead in the first inning on back-to-back one-out singles from Chih-Fang Pang and Jordan Tripp ahead of a two-out RBI single to right field for Oberacker. The Lake Monsters added an unearned run in the fourth as Oberacker led off with a bunt single and scored all the way from first when leftfielder Travis Taijeron misplayed a single from Chris Affinito for a 2-0 lead.

The Lake Monsters added three insurance runs in the seventh off reliever Randy Fontanez, including another RBI single from Oberacker for a 3-0 lead. Vermont scored another run on a wild pitch before a Jacob Tanis RBI single plated Affinito for a 5-run lead.

Macias (2-2) allowed four hits over the first six innings and had retired seven Cyclones in a row before allowing Charley Thurber leadoff infield single in the seventh inning and then left the game after hitting the next batter. Thurber later scored in the inning on a bases loaded forceout, but reliever Ryan Hughes worked out of further trouble with strikeout and another forceout.

Taijeron went 2-for-2 with two doubles and scored Brooklyn's second run of the game in the ninth on a Jonathan Clark two-out RBI single off reliever Nathan Kilcrease, who got potential-tying run Ismael Tijerina to line out to third base to end the game for the Stedler Division-leading Lake Monsters.

Pan and Affinito each had two hits for Vermont (12-6), which has won seven of its last nine games. Cyclone starter Marco Camarena (1-1) allowed two runs (one earned) on five hits over five innings to take the loss as Brooklyn fell to 11-9 on the season.

The Lake Monsters and Cyclones meet in game two of the three-game series in Brooklyn on Thursday before the series finale Friday. Vermont returns home to historic Centennial Field on Saturday for a three-game series against the McNamara-Division leading Staten Island Yankees through Monday.