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Saturday, May 12, 2012

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Oakland 11, Detroit 4: Brandon Inge again lights up puzzled Tigers

Inge has eight RBIs in two games vs. former team

May 12, 2012

By Shawn Windsor / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND -- Jim Leyland can't explain the inconsistency or the struggles at the plate.

For a dozen games now, the Tigers have followed a win with a loss. The math isn't complicated; that's .500 ball, exactly where the Tigers find themselves 32 games into the season -- average. Blame the bats.

Detroit scored 10 runs Thursday night and scored four Friday night, though that was deceiving because two of those runs came late, when the Tigers were trailing by nine. This is to say that before Oakland began pounding Detroit's bullpen in the 6th inning, the Tigers managed only five hits and two runs.

Leyland figured the offensive explosion the night before might carry over to Friday. He was wrong. He has no idea why.

"I thought we'd come out of it," he said, after Oakland beat Detroit, 11-4. "Really hard to put your finger on it, been kind of puzzling."

And it all started so promising. Austin Jackson, one of only two regular position players hitting above .300 (Andy Dirks is the other), began the game with a double. Dirks followed with a single.

Two minutes into the game and Detroit seemed to be picking up from Thursday night's blowout win. Miguel Cabrera then hit into a double play. Jackson scored to give the Tigers a brief lead, but the bases were suddenly empty and all that potential momentum was gone.

Prince Fielder then struck out.

It may seem counterintuitive in an 11-4 game, but Leyland felt that missed opportunity changed the game. The Tigers took the field with a 1-0 lead. It easily could've been three or four.

The opposite happened for Oakland. Detroit starter Rick Porcello got the first two A's batters easily, inducing a groundout and a pop-out. But Porcello had trouble making his sinker sink and he gave up a single, a double, a walk and a single, all with two outs. Two runs scored, the last courtesy of Brandon Inge, who poked an opposite-field grounder between first and second to break the tie.

It was the kind of hitting that Inge rarely displayed during his last two seasons in Detroit. He was patient and didn't try to yank anything into the seats. He saved that maneuver for later, when he broke open the game with a three-run shot in the 6th inning.

Said Leyland: "He's really swinging well right now. He's got a second wind and it's good for him. He's swinging the bat as good as I've seen him swing it for a while. He's in a pretty good groove right now."

For some fans this only twists the knife more forcefully, watching a player so many loathed crack another shot into the seats -- Inge hit a grand slam Thursday night, which followed a walk-off grand slam Tuesday night to beat Toronto. Leyland and Inge's former teammates in the clubhouse don't worry about such things.

Besides, there are much bigger issues. Like how to win consecutive games, something Detroit hasn't done since the last two games in Kansas City April 17 and 18.

"We just have to put it all together, that's the bottom line," said Gerald Laird, who played for Alex Avila Friday.

Avila will likely catch today and Sunday to finish out the series. Leyland wants to be careful with his young catcher after he wore down at the end of last year. It certainly doesn't hurt that Laird has hit well in limited duty this season.

The back-up catcher is right at .300. He went 1-for-4 against the A's and one of the few batters Leyland praised for taking the pre-game approach discussed in the clubhouse and applying it during the game. His single went to the opposite field.

A strategy the Tigers thought they could employ to get to Tommy Milone, a lefty who relies on changing speeds but not much else. Leyland said he'd watch one of his hitters follow the approach and then abandoned it the next time up.

"It's puzzling," Leyland said, "we talked to the hitters before the game about the guys' stuff."

It wasn't overwhelming. In fact Laird said he hoped Detroit would see Milone again. Porcello's stuff, on the other hand, was just fine. His control wasn't.

"From the get-go I was out of sync," he said. "I wasn't locating the fastball down in the zone. I had a tough time getting the middle of the order out. It's not a good combination for an effective game."

Still, this was the first relatively poor outing from a starter in nine games. It still comes back to the bats.

"It's tough," said Laird, "there is no excuse. We have a better team than what we are showing. We all know that. It's frustrating ... by the end of May we've gotta get this stuff rolling."

Athletics 11, Tigers 4: Notes, quotes from Friday's loss

May 12, 2012

By Shawn Windsor / Detroit Free Press

WHAT HAPPENED: Rick Porcello couldn't keep his sinker down consistently enough and paid for it by giving up four early runs. All that action sent his pitch count up, which prevented Porcello from pitching past the 5th inning. This forced Jim Leyland to go to his bullpen. And the bullpen hasn't been sharp lately. The A's took advantage and tacked on seven more runs. The Tigers, meanwhile, managed just five hits and two runs through the first seven innings. A late two-run effort in the 8th belied the offensive struggles.

OH, THAT BULLPEN: Duane Below didn't give up a run in his first eight outings this season. He gave up four in the 6th inning. Collin Balester pitched the 7th inning and gave up three more runs. Neither Below or Balester has pitched much lately. Jim Leyland said he was trying to get both work. When Below entered the game the Tigers only trailed 4-2.

OH, THAT OFFENSE: After scoring 10 runs the night before at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum, the Tigers managed only four Friday night. But two came in the 8th inning when Detroit trailed by nine runs and faced the weakest part of the A's bullpen. Until that point, the Tigers had produced five hits and two runs.

ONE SLUGGER UP, THE OTHER DOWN: Miguel Cabrera broke out of an 0-for-13 slump Thursday night by collecting four hits. He singled two more times Friday. Prince Fielder, meanwhile, is now hitless in his past 13 at-bats. Fielder's average has fallen to .286. **QUOTABLE:** "It's really hard to put your finger on right now," Leyland said of his team's offensive struggles. "been kind of puzzling."

THREE STARS: 1. Tommy Milone, 2. Josh Reddick, 3. Brandon Inge.

Jim Leyland wants to get Tigers bullpen in order

May 12, 2012

By Shawn Windsor / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- The Tigers have lost five games in which they've led in the seventh inning or later.

"That's unusual for us," manager Jim Leyland said Friday.

Last year, the Tigers' bullpen led the American League in saves.

The early bullpen struggles are partly a result of missing Doug Fister, Leyland said. Smoothing out the bullpen rotation is crucial.

"That's the one thing we've got to get synced," Leyland said. "I haven't really done a good job of that just yet. I think the key to that is Fister being back in the rotation. I think we will get that ironed out now."

Leyland said now that all five starters are healthy and set, he should be able to set up a pattern for the bullpen.

This means using Collin Balester, Luke Putkonen and Duane Below up until the sixth inning. After the sixth, Leyland said, "you will see (Octavio) Dotel and (Phil) Coke and (Joaquin) Benoit and (Jose) Valverde. That's when it is drawn up perfect."

Leyland said Valverde -- despite having blown two saves -- is the closer.

"And I assume he will be my closer all year," Leyland said. "Now if something drastic happens, then I will make an adjustment."

Closing, he said, is "a tough job, it's like a third-base coach: You don't get noticed until you get somebody thrown out. (With a) closer you don't get noticed until you blow one."

BRIEFLY: Right-handed reliever Luis Marte is supposed to pitch today during an extended spring training game in Lakeland, Fla. Marte suffered a left hamstring strain April 4. Leyland said he had no idea how long it would take before Marte is ready to join the team.

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More Details

Matchup: Tigers at Oakland, 8:05.

TV/radio: FSD, WXYT-FM (97.1).

Pitching: Tigers -- RH Doug Fister (0-0, 0.00 ERA). Athletics -- RH Brandon McCarthy (2-3, 2.96).

Tigers' Andy Dirks thriving at No. 2 spot in the lineup

May 12, 2012

By Shawn Windsor / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- The first hole Andy Dirks plugged opened up in New York two weeks ago. The Tigers needed a leftfielder, and Dirks ran down two deep fly balls that no one on the roster -- except for centerfielder Austin Jackson -- would've had a shot at.

The second hole Dirks filled was the No. 2 spot in the lineup. Brennan Boesch was struggling in that role and the team needed someone to bridge Jackson's stellar leadoff play to the team's run producers, Miguel Cabrera and Prince Fielder.

Since that weekend in New York, Dirks has played in 10 games through Thursday's 10-6 win over the A's. He continues to battle a sore hamstring. Yet he is the hottest hitter on the team.

Entering Friday's game against Oakland, Dirks was hitting .383, 61 percentage points more than the next-closest Tiger -- Jackson. He'd hit .571 in his previous five games and smacked at least one extra-base hit in each of them. (He hit a first-inning, solo homer Thursday night to go along with three other hits.)

Manager Jim Leyland really wants Dirks to settle into the No. 2 spot in the lineup -- Dirks was penciled in Friday even though the A's were scheduled to start a left-hander. Yet Leyland also wants Dirks to get completely healthy.

"It's a tough situation to manage right now," Leyland said Friday. "I gave him the night off (Wednesday in Seattle) and he bounced back real good. But he's not running full speed. I'm a little concerned about it."

Leyland said he had a productive chat with team trainer Kevin Rand on Thursday night to strategize.

"And the question I asked him was: 'Can Dirks get a 100% if I'm playing him?' He thinks he can. But he doesn't know to what point. And it's tough because I could get him out of there late if we have a lead or something, (but) at the same time you've got to score a run in the second or third or maybe the first inning."

In other words, Leyland doesn't want to risk losing that spark early in the game. So Dirks will keep playing, monitoring himself and trying not to push it running unless he has to. Leyland said his biggest concern is that Dirks will tear after a ball in left and tweak the hamstring again.

"He made a couple nice catches in recent games. He got after it pretty good," said Leyland. "Is (that) gonna make it worse?"

Dirks felt his hamstring after his speed-runs in leftfield in New York. But those two plays saved runs and helped the Tigers beat the Yankees that day. And with the team still trying to find its way offensively, such defensive plays are crucial.

So is Dirks' bat.

The 26-year-old outfielder burst onto the scene two years ago in spring training. He was called up last year from Toledo and played in 78 games, hitting .251. That number wasn't inline with what he'd done at every level of the minors, however, so when Dirks led the Grapefruit League in hitting this spring, the Tigers chose Dirks over outfielder Clete Thomas.

"So far it looks like we made the right decision," said Leyland. "He's really a nice player. I like him."

What Leyland likes is Dirks' compact stroke, a swing allows Dirks to fight off pitches when behind in the count. Leyland also appreciates Dirks' maturity in the batter's box.

"He doesn't try to do too much," he said, "(He's) a pretty sharp hitter for a young guy. He knows when to turn on a ball once in a while, but he also knows how to take a base hit the other way."

Tom Brookens saw the same thing in 2009, when Dirks made the jump from Lakeland to Erie, where Brookens was managing.

"He really took off. He seemed to get a lot of big hits for us," Brookens said, "It got to the point where I was wanting him to be the guy to come up to the plate, which was unusual for a young player. And we had a lot of good players on that team."

Dirks has gotten stronger since he played for Brookens that season, as evidenced by all those extra-base hits recently.

Now, Brookens said, "he does everything pretty good. We all say, 'He's just a ballplayer,' a fireplug-type guy. He gives us that little element of speed that we quite honestly don't have a lot of. He's given us some spark."

More Details: Hitting it big

Leftfielder Andy Dirks, who led the Tigers with a .383 average, entering Friday's game, was hitting .571 in his last five games.

Brandon Inge bites Tigers again in loss to A's

May 12, 2012

By Tom Gage / The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif. — Brandon Inge and Lou Gehrig make strange bash brothers.

But it's true, they are now statistically linked — so there's only one thing the Tigers can do.

Like Dorothy in the "Wizard of Oz" saying, "There's no place like home, there's no place like home," the Tigers can only shut their eyes and say, "It wasn't a mistake, it wasn't a mistake."

Inge was done as a Tiger.

But it looks like the second act of his career is just beginning with the Oakland Athletics.

With the help of Inge's three-run home run off Duane Below in the sixth inning, the A's toppled the Tigers 11-4 on Friday night at the Oakland Coliseum.

Along with his run-scoring single in the first inning, Inge has four RBIs in each of the two games he has played against his former team. He hit a grand slam Thursday night in the Tigers' 10-6 victory.

In 10 games with Oakland, Inge has 17 RBIs — as many as he had in his last 89 for the Tigers.

But more than that, Inge is the first player since Gehrig in 1931 to have four games of four or more RBIs in a five-game stretch, according to Elias Sports Bureau.

Suffice to say, Inge's new teammates are impressed.

"What more can he do? He's been great," said Josh Reddick, who hit two home runs Friday. "I don't know what the guys across the way were thinking when they let him go."

It's not what the Tigers were thinking. It's what Inge was doing at the plate for them, practically nothing, that led to his release.

But with the Tigers throwing him too many fastballs, and not "expanding the zone" against him with breaking balls, as manager Jim Leyland has said the last two nights, Inge is feasting against his former team.

"He's swinging the bat as well as I've seen him swing it in a while," Leyland said. "We're throwing him a lot of strikes. We probably didn't expand the zone enough."

With Inge's help, the A's stretched their 4-2 lead to 8-2 with their four runs in the sixth. They added three more in the seventh on Reddick's second home run of the game, a three-run shot off Collin Balester over a leaping Ryan Raburn in right.

It was Balester who gave up Inge's slam in the first game of the series.

Meanwhile, the Tigers can't get out of their monotonous two-step of winning one game but losing the next.

Since they were 10-9, they've alternated winning with losing for the last 13 games, going 6-7 in that time — which brings them to their current 16-16 record.

"It's kind of puzzling," said Leyland. "It's hard to figure out."

Rick Porcello lasted five innings in this loss, falling to 3-3 for the season. He allowed four runs on nine hits.

Left-hander Tommy Milone (5-2) worked seven innings for the victory.

"From the get-go, I was out of sync," said Porcello.

Tigers catcher Gerald Laird said Porcello "had a hard time commanding his fastball into lefties, but I thought he had good stuff.

"It was moving so much, it was coming back over the middle of the plate."

And Milone's stuff?

"Changes speed," Laird said, "but maybe a guy we hopefully see again.

"It's tough, though. We're a better team than we're showing. It's frustrating because after getting 17 hits, we come out against a guy we thought we could get some runs off and didn't get it done."

Miguel Cabrera knocked in two runs with singles, briefly tying the score in the third with his first hit. He also drove in a run in the eighth when the Tigers found themselves nine runs down.

With his two hits, Cabrera has six in two games against the A's after going hitless against the Mariners on the trip's first stop.

Tigers' Andy Dirks scorching at the plate

May 12, 2012

By Tom Gage / The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif.— Remember when Andy Dirks was hitting .339?

Yeah, that was a four-hit game ago.

Absolutely sizzling, Dirks is hitting .381. He had three singles and solo home run in the Tigers' 10-6 victory on Thursday night, and went 1 for 3 in Detroit's 11-4 loss Friday night.

Miguel Cabrera had four hits Thursday as the Tigers finally put a substantial number of runs on the board — much to manager Jim Leyland's relief.

"Maybe that will loosen them up a little bit," Leyland said.

Despite a tight hamstring, Dirks was loose already.

Seriously, a lot of his recent hot-hitting has been done with the limitation that's kept him from pushing himself to the max on the bases.

His hamstring is occasionally sore, but it hasn't blown out — and with Dirks making sure he doesn't ask too much of it on the bases, he's been able to stay in the lineup.

That means his bat has been able to stay in the lineup, too.

"But it's a tough situation to manage," Leyland said Friday, "because he's not running full-speed. I'm a little concerned about it.

"He can kick it in gear if he needs to, but he's definitely not pushing it. I don't think a couple of days (out) would get the job done.

"It's a real tough situation. We're just getting through it the best we can."

Dirks has been punishing pitchers on all kinds of counts so far, but he also has done well with second chances.

Case in point: Thursday night.

Former Tiger Brandon Inge had just taken a hit away from Austin Jackson at third base to start the game when Dirks hit a ball into the vast foul territory at the Oakland Coliseum.

Looking like he had no chance to get to the ball, a sprawling Inge got his glove on it, but couldn't hang on. Slow to get back on his feet, Inge acted like he might have hurt himself while diving for the ball.

"I wasn't hurt," he said. "I stayed down because I was mad I didn't catch it."

Dirks put the reprieve to good use by hitting a Bartolo Colon pitch deep to right for his third home run of the season.

For a hitter as hot as Dirks, second chances aren't often wasted. Then again, nothing is getting wasted.

"Nothing affects him," Inge said. "Curtis Granderson was the same way, never a high/low guy. Those are the guys who stay around a while."

So how hot is Dirks? This hot.

Not including Friday night's game, Dirks is 4-for-4 on 0-2 counts and 4-for-9 on 1-2 counts. Being down a strike or two hasn't fazed him.

"Anybody with a pretty short, compact swing has a chance to be successful in those situations," said Leyland, "but he's a pretty good two-strike hitter.

"It would nice if he could settle in the No. 2 hole."

Batting second, having dislodged Brennan Boesch, Dirks is 10-for-17 (.588), but with it also being a contact spot, it's impressive that Dirks hasn't yet struck out while hitting second.

Entering Friday, Dirks has hit .405 in his last 13 games, .455 in his last 10 games and .571 in his last five — going from hot to scalding.

He's batting .392 against right-handers, .333 against left and a case might be made so far that as Dirks goes, so go the Tigers.

In their victories, he's hitting .436. In their losses, he's hitting .286. The Tigers are 10-6 when he starts, their best won-lost record for any player on the team.

Does that make Dirks the Most Valuable Player so far? Such an argument could be made — but let's just say, instead of comparisons, that he's been highly valuable. And has become highly indispensable.

"I feel pretty good at the plate right now," Dirks told FOX Sports Detroit after Thursday night's victory. "It goes in phases but I'm just trying to stay focused as much as I can with every at-bat, every single pitch."

Dirks came to spring training off a dramatic title-winning hit in the Dominican Republic's winter league, and he kept right on hitting there at a .429 clip.

You might recall that when asked if his hit in the Dominican made him a celebrity, Dirks said, "I'm not a celebrity, Kim Kardashian is a celebrity. I'm not Kim Kardashian."

For the Tigers' purposes, that's just fine. Kim Kardashian wouldn't be 4-for-4 on 0-2 counts.

If not a celebrity, though, what is Dirks?

"He's a naturally gifted country ballplayer," said Inge, "one of those guys you don't even have to coach much.

Got my bat, got my glove, let's go."

Let's go hit .381, in fact.

Tigers manager Jim Leyland praises Ryan Raburn daily

May 12, 2012

By Tom Gage / The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif. - Even with a .128 batting average, Ryan Raburn gets daily support from manager Jim Leyland. Hardly a day goes by that Leyland doesn't say something encouraging about how Raburn is swinging - almost as if the manager is verbally trying to pull him through this prolonged slump.

"He's someone I think is a good player, someone who doesn't know how good he is," Leyland said. "I just want to keep him halfway pumped up. He's got to get that confidence going."

Earlier on this road trip, Leyland said he likes Raburn in the lineup because when he's hitting "he can do damage." But with no homers and just two RBIs through Friday night's 11-4 loss to the Athletics, though, there has not been much damage, so far.

Raburn hit the ball hard a couple of times Thursday night, but his only hit, a double, came on a misjudged liner to center. He went 0 for 4 Friday.

Even so, "I thought he swung the bat pretty well," Leyland said of Thursday's outing.

With Raburn's history of not hitting until the summer months, the Tigers aren't about to give up on him. They're just hoping to get production out of him earlier than usual.

So the support will continue.

Avila sits

For the third time in the first five games of this trip, catcher Alex Avila didn't start Friday night. But he's not looking at sitting out two games in a row — as he did earlier this week in Seattle.

"He's going to catch the next two games (Saturday and Sunday)," Leyland said, "and I just thought that with his knee situation (sore left patella tendon), it was the perfect time to get him out of there."

"I wouldn't have had him catch all four here even if he'd been 100 percent. I'm not going to catch him every day. We went through that last year. We beat him up so bad."

Even-keeled Dirks

When asked if hot-hitting Andy Dirks (.381 batting average) reacts the same whether he's 0-for-4 or 4-for-4, Leyland said, "he seems pretty even-keeled."

"But they can be that way here and could be banging their head against a hotel wall, for all I know."

Around the horn

More on Dirks from Leyland: "This spring we had to make a decision between Dirks and Clete Thomas, and so far it looks like we made the right decision. He's really a nice player."

... Phil Coke was to get Friday night off, "but all the others are OK," Leyland said. . .

... Max Scherzer didn't pitch well because of a big lead on Thursday night. He pitched well because "he went at it full bore the whole way," Leyland said.

"Some guys can't pitch with a big lead, they're not sure what to do. So I always try to convince them like it was 1-0."

... On the disabled list since the last day of spring training because of a left hamstring strain, right-hander Luis Marte is scheduled to pitch today in extended spring training — his first time on the mound in a competitive situation since he got hurt.

Tigers at Athletics

First pitch: 8:05 p.m., Oakland Coliseum

TV/radio: FSD/97.1, 1270

Probables: RHP Doug Fister (0-0, 0.00) vs. RHP Brandon McCarthy (2-3, 2.96)

Scouting report

Fister, Tigers: Worked seven scoreless innings in Seattle to start the Tigers' three-city trip, and needed only 73 pitches to get through them, but didn't get a decision because of the Tigers' bullpen collapse in the ninth.

McCarthy, A's : He's also pitched well, but with little to show for it because of low run support (seventh lowest in the American League). He's 2-1 with a 2.18 ERA in his last three starts.

Up-and-down Detroit Tigers still struggling to 'put it all together' offensively

May 12, 2012

By Chris Iott / MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Win. Loss. Win. Loss. Win. Loss.

That's how it's been for the Detroit Tigers for the past two weeks. Their latest loss came Friday night, when they dropped an 11-4 decision to the Oakland A's.

That came a day after the Tigers beat the A's, 10-6. Which came a day after, well, you get the picture.

Manager Jim Leyland spoke about how the approach Tigers hitters took against A's starter Tommy Milone seemed to ebb and flow.

"We talked to the hitters before the game about his stuff and what's probably a good approach," Leyland said.

"It seems like the approach is there one at-bat and the next at-bat it's not there for whatever reason. It's a little puzzling."

The pattern of alternating the good with the bad is so strange that now even Tigers hitters are taking turns having slumps.

Miguel Cabrera broke out of his 0-for-14 skid with an impressive game Thursday night and followed it up with another one Friday. He is 6-for-9 with five RBIs in his past two games.

But now the guy who bats behind him, Prince Fielder, is in an 0-for-13 slump dating back to his solo home run Tuesday against the Seattle Mariners.

The Tigers clearly are not firing on all cylinders and haven't for a long time.

"We've just got to pull it together," catcher Gerald Laird said. "That's the bottom line. It's tough. There's no excuse. We have a better team than we're showing. Obviously, we all know that. We've just got to put it all together."

There were a couple key moments in the game Friday night. The first one came in the first inning after Austin Jackson led off with a double and Andy Dirks followed with a single. The Tigers had a chance to blow it open against Milone, but Cabrera grounded into a double play.

Jackson scored on the double play, but it basically eliminated any chance of the Tigers putting together a big inning to get the game started.

The Tigers trailed 4-2 through five innings and were still very much in the game at that point. But a four-run sixth inning -- highlighted by a three-run home run from Brandon Inge -- was a major turning point. It gave the A's an 8-2 lead and put the game all but out of reach for the Tigers.

The Tigers rapped out 17 hits while scoring 10 runs Thursday night and seemed to be primed to break out of their slump. But they had just two runs on five hits through seven innings Friday before breaking through for a couple meaningless runs in the eighth.

"That's just baseball," Danny Worth said. "It's going to happen, stuff like that. We all know we're going to get out of it. Just keep plugging away, we'll get our bats there and stuff's going to turn for us."

Still, the Tigers know they can't simply assume that they will get their bats going. They know there is a pressing need to get things headed in the right direction.

"We're battling, but we can't keep saying that," Laird said. "We're almost 40 games into the season. By the end of May, we have to get this stuff going."

Brandon Inge has Oakland A's teammate wondering why Detroit Tigers let him go

May 12, 2012

By Chris Iott / MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Brandon Inge. Lou Gehrig. Not names you normally see together in the same paragraph. But there they are.

Inge hit a three-run home run and knocked in four runs Friday night to become the first player in more than 80 years to have four games of at least four RBIs in a five-game span.

Lou Gehrig was the last to accomplish that feat. He did it during the 1931 season.

"What else can he do?" Oakland A's outfielder Josh Reddick said after his team's 11-4 win over the Detroit Tigers. "He's been great. I don't know what the guys across the way were thinking when they let him go."

Inge had four RBIs on Friday night in an 11-4 victory over the Detroit Tigers one night after he hit a grand slam in a 10-6 loss to the Tigers.

Like the night before, Inge hit a fastball that was in the meat of the strike zone, this time from left-hander Duane Below.

"We threw him a lot of strikes, and he's really swinging well right now," Tigers manager Jim Leyland said.

"He's got a second wind and it's a good thing, obviously, for him. He's swinging the bat as good as I've seen him swing it in a while.

"We probably didn't expand the zone enough, but he's in a pretty good groove."

Inge said facing Below in batting practice during spring training helped him prepare for the at-bat. He said Below's fastball has movement on it that makes it seem like it is rising as it approaches the plate, so Inge said he focused on staying on top of the ball.

"It was a fastball kind of down the middle, and I was just trying to lift it up in the zone," Inge said. "I'll tell you what, he's going to be a bright spot in that bullpen for a while to come."

The grand slam Thursday ended up being meaningless as far as which team got the victory. It simply helped the A's cut their deficit from 10-2 to 10-6. But the home run Friday helped the A's pull away. The score was 4-2 when the sixth inning began, and Inge's three-run home run made it 8-2.

"It's such a mixed emotional feeling, it's hard to explain," Inge said. "I want to do well and I want to hit the ball. Every time I get in the box, my mindset is to take a good swing and basically smash the ball, hammer the ball somewhere. But right after it's done, it's like, 'Man, these are my buddies I just messed up a little bit.' So it's a very respectful ... it's hard to explain."

Inge is 10-for-41 (.244) with four home runs and 17 RBIs in 10 games for the A's.

Brandon Inge hits three-run home run to help send Detroit Tigers to 11-4 loss

May 12, 2012

By Chris Iott / MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- A familiar face helped the Detroit Tigers to a familiar fate.

Brandon Inge hit a three-run home run to help the Oakland A's pull away Friday night as the Detroit Tigers continued a trend of alternating wins and losses with an 11-4 loss to the A's.

It's been one step forward, one step back for the Tigers since April 27, when they saw a losing streak stretch to five games following a 7-6 loss to the New York Yankees. The Tigers claimed a 7-5 victory the next day and have alternated wins and losses ever since.

The Tigers have not won consecutive games since April 18, when they won their fourth consecutive game and completed a three-game sweep of the Kansas City Royals. They have played 20 games since then.

Tigers starter Rick Porcello left the game after five innings Friday night with the Tigers trailing 4-2, but the A's broke it open against relief pitcher Duane Below, who had not allowed a run in 14 innings pitched this season coming into the game. Josh Reddick singled home a run with one out to make it 5-2, and Inge hit his three-run home run to left field with two outs to make it 8-2.

That gave Inge four RBIs in the game and eight so far in the series. Inge hit a grand slam to right field Thursday night in the first game of the four-game series, a 10-6 win for the Tigers.

According to the Elias Sports Bureau, Inge is the first player to have four games of at least four RBIs in a five-game span since Lou Gehrig in 1931.

The Tigers scored a run in the top of the first to take an early lead. Austin Jackson led off the game with a double, went to third on a single by Andy Dirks and scored on a double-play grounder off the bat of Miguel Cabrera.

The A's bounced right back with two runs in the bottom of the inning off Porcello. Porcello retired the first two batters he faced, but the next four reached base. Inge singled in a run for the A's during that rally.

The Tigers tied the game in the top of the third. Gerald Laird reached base on an error by Inge, moved to second on a single by Danny Worth, advanced to third on a fly ball to right field by Jackson and scored on a two-out single by Cabrera. That made it 2-2.

But the A's bounced back in the bottom of the inning with two runs to retake the lead. Reddick led off the inning with a home run to right field, and Kila Ka'aihue and Seth Smith followed with back-to-back doubles to make it 4-2.

Reddick hit a three-run home run in the seventh inning off Collin Balester, who gave up the grand slam to Inge the night before, to make it 11-2. It was the first multi-home run game of his career, and he finished the game 4-for-4 with a walk, five RBIs and four runs scored.

The Tiger rallied for a pair of runs in the eighth. Cabrera and Delmon Young had RBI singles in the inning. Porcello allowed four runs on nine hits and three walks in five innings of work. He struck out four.

Sunday seems like good bet for Jacob Turner to make start for Triple-A Toledo

May 12, 2012

By Chris Iott / MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- When will right-hander Jacob Turner be promoted from Single-A Lakeland to Triple-A Toledo?

Neither the Detroit Tigers nor the Mud Hens have not made an announcement, but it should be very soon, maybe even in a couple days.

Turner made his fourth start of the season for Lakeland on Tuesday and pitched impressively. He struck out eight while allowing just four hits in seven innings of shutout ball. His ERA through four starts is 1.66.

Turner competed in spring training for the fifth starter job that eventually went to Drew Smyly, but Turner was shut down early due to tendinitis in his throwing shoulder. He made his first start at Lakeland on April 23 and has pitched well in three of his four outings with Lakeland.

Turner is on schedule to start again Sunday, but which team will he start for? Lakeland? Toledo?

Four starts in Lakeland seem like plenty for Turner to be prepared to return to Triple-A. The Mud Hens have Casey Crosby listed as their starter for Sunday at Gwinnett. But my money says Turner will make that start.

Alex Avila says knee feels much better, will be in starting lineup this weekend

May 12, 2012

By Chris Iott / MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- No need for Detroit Tigers fans to worry. Alex Avila's knee is just fine.

Avila was not in the starting lineup Friday night against the Oakland A's, but that was due mainly to the fact that left-hander Tommy Milone was starting for the Oakland A's.

"I just felt with the knee situation that this would be the perfect time," Leyland said. "He'll catch the next two games. I probably wouldn't have had him catch all four even if everything was 100 percent. It's a perfect time to get him out of there."

Avila said the difference in the knee Friday from when he injured it Monday was "night and day."

Avila had left patellar tendon soreness after hurting his knee while fielding a bunt Monday night. He did not play Tuesday or Wednesday against the Seattle Mariners, but he returned to action Thursday in the series opener against the A's.

Avila has started 23 games thus far and would make about 120 starts this season if he continues on his current pace. He made 130 starts in 2011 in part because the Tigers could not use Victor Martinez as a catcher for a long stretch of the second half because of a knee injury Martinez was dealing with.

"I'm not going to catch him every game," Leyland said. "We went through that last year, and we just beat him up so bad, particularly at this stage with the knee acting up a little bit."

Gerald Laird will start tonight in place of Avila. Laird is hitting .308 in 11 games this season.

Detroit Tigers reliever Luis Marte to pitch in game for first time since suffering hamstring injury

May 12, 2012

By Chris Iott / MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- The comeback from a left hamstring strain has been a long one for Detroit Tigers right-hander Luis Marte. But he is about to take a major step in his rehabilitation.

Marte is scheduled to pitch Saturday in an extended spring training game in Lakeland, Fla. It will be his first game action since he injured his hamstring in the final Grapefruit League game.

The Tigers named Marte to the Opening Day roster on April 1, but he suffered the injury April 3 and was replaced on the roster by left-hander Duane Below.

Below has settled in as a left-handed long reliever, so it is unclear whether Marte would return to the Tigers or to Triple-A Toledo when he is deemed healthy enough to return. It is possible he could fill the spot currently held by rookie right-hander Luke Putkonen.

Marte went 2-0 with a 2.77 ERA in 10 appearances this spring. He allowed just five hits and struck out 16 in 13 innings pitched. Marte went 1-0 with a 2.45 ERA in four games for the Tigers last season.

Lineup: Detroit Tigers' Andy Dirks batting second again, appears to have spot in everyday lineup

May 12, 2012

By James Schmehl / MLive.com

DETROIT -- It appears outfielder Andy Dirks has cemented his role as the Detroit Tigers' everyday No. 2 hitter. Despite a left-handed pitcher slated to start tonight for Oakland, manager Jim Leyland has Dirks batting second and starting in left field for his fifth straight game.

Tonight's lineup suggests Dirks could be inserted in the team's everyday lineup for the foreseeable future -- as long as the tightness in his left hamstring doesn't flare up.

Left-hander Tommy Milone will start for Oakland, prompting Leyland to stack his lineup heavy with right-handed hitters as the Tigers continue their four-game road set Friday.

Dirks, who is batting .571 with two home runs and six RBIs in his last five games, and Prince Fielder are the only two left-handed hitters in the starting order.

Ryan Raburn will spell Brennan Boesch in right field and bat sixth behind designated hitter Delmon Young. It will be Raburn's third start in right field this season.

Rick Porcello will take the mound for the Tigers after only allowing four runs in 14 1/3 innings his last two starts.

Gerald Laird is behind the plate, allowing Alex Avila to rest -- a day after he returned to the lineup after missing two straight games with a sore left patellar tendon.

Laird has been Porcello's batterymate in four of his six starts.

Here's tonight's starting lineup:

DETROIT TIGERS

1. Austin Jackson, CF
2. Andy Dirks, LF
3. Miguel Cabrera, 3B
4. Prince Fielder, 1B
5. Delmon Young, DH
6. Ryan Raburn, RF
7. Jhonny Peralta, SS
8. Gerald Laird, C
9. Danny Worth, 2B.

Rick Porcello RHP.

OAKLAND ATHLETICS

1. Jemile Weeks, 2B
 2. Cliff Pennington, SS
 3. Josh Reddick, RF
 4. Kila Ka'aihue, DH
 5. Seth Smith, LF
 6. Brandon Inge, 3B
 7. Daric Barton, 1B
 8. Kurt Suzuki, C
 9. Collin Cowgill, CF
- Tommy Milone LHP

Ryan Raburn one of three second basemen hitting below .200 for Detroit Tigers

May 12, 2012

By Chris Iott / MLive.com

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Clearly, many Detroit Tigers fans have seen enough of Ryan Raburn at second base. More accurately, they have grown tired of seeing Raburn in the starting lineup every day at second base. Raburn has been a notoriously slow starter during his career, and the 2012 season has been no different. He is hitting .217 with a .651 OPS in the first half for his career and .300 with an .847 OPS in the second half. His numbers this season are brutal. Raburn is hitting .134 with two RBIs and 21 strikeouts in 26 games. One issue for the Tigers is that they don't have a second baseman with a track record of offensive production to take over should they decide to send Raburn to the bench. Danny Worth is hitting .182. Ramon Santiago is hitting .163.

Here is a comparison of the offensive numbers for some candidates for the everyday role.

Ryan Raburn

Season: .134 BA, .200 OBP, .183 SLG, .383 OPS

Career: .261 BA, .316 OBP, .441 SLG, .757 OPS

The numbers clearly show that Raburn is having an awful season. They also clearly show that his career average, on-base percentage, slugging percentage and on-base plus slugging number are all higher than the other three players on this list. The Tigers would benefit by Raburn playing at his best more than they would from any of the other three at his best. The question is: How long will it take Raburn to get there? Can the Tigers wait that long?

Ramon Santiago

Season: .163 BA, .208 OBP, .224 SLG, .432 OPS

Career: .247 BA, .313 OBP, .339 SLG, .652 OPS

Santiago is thought by many to be a "what you see is what you get" player who is solid defensively but doesn't hit for a high average or much power. The Tigers have had several opportunities to institute him as the starting second baseman. They haven't done it. They don't seem likely to do it anytime soon.

Danny Worth

Season: .182 BA, .308 OBP, .182 SLG, .490 OPS

Career: .253 BA, .299 OBP, .338 SLG, .636 OPS

Worth is an excellent defender who can play three infield positions. For those who think the career numbers listed above are not a fair sample size, here are his offensive numbers in five seasons at Triple-A: .258/.326/.382/.708. Is he a long-term solution at second base? Tough to tell. Might the Tigers try him out to see if he is a better alternative -- at least in the short-term -- than Raburn? It's very possible.

Eric Patterson

Season (at Toledo): .294 BA, .440 OBP, .358 SLG, .798 OPS

Career: .217 BA, .294 OBP, .343 SLG, .637 OPS

Patterson is an extreme long shot for a few reasons, but he is included here because he is currently playing second base most of the time for Triple-A Toledo. Patterson is not on the 40-man roster. And while he is having an excellent offensive season for the Mud Hens, he hit just .180 last season for the San Diego Padres and struck out 22 times in 89 at-bats.

The Tigers appear to be clearly giving Raburn every opportunity to succeed because -- when he is on his game -- he is by far the most productive player of these four.

But what if Raburn doesn't get things turned around? What if he is still hitting below .150 in a week or two or three? Then Leyland will likely give another player a shot. The most likely candidate would be Worth. And if that move is made, expect Leyland to give Worth some time -- even if he struggles -- to see whether or not he can be the answer.

Of course, a trade is always a possibility, but that is likely to be pursued later rather than sooner. And only if the Tigers can't solve the issue internally.

Assuming a trade is not an option right now, who do you think should start at second base?

Tigers unable to cool off Inge in loss to A's

Streak of consecutive quality starts ends at nine

May 12, 2012

By Jason Beck / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The Tigers found the form they'd been looking for out of Brandon Inge ever since last summer. It just came in the wrong uniform for them, even if it has become the right situation for Inge.

"He's swinging the bat as good as I've seen him swing it for a while," Tigers manager Jim Leyland said after Friday's 11-4 loss to the A's. "We probably didn't expand the zone enough, but he's in a pretty good groove right now."

With four RBIs in four of his past five games, including each of the first two games of this four-game set against his old club, Inge might be on his best stretch ever. Statistically, according to Elias Sports Bureau, he's the first Major Leaguer with four four-RBI performances in a five-game stretch since Lou Gehrig in 1931. The Tigers, meanwhile, are caught in a pattern, alternating wins and losses for their past 13 games. They've been hovering at .500 or a game above it every day since April 26 -- ironically, the day they released Inge. They were spinning their wheels in that mud well before they crossed paths with Inge again. With Doug Fister and Justin Verlander starting the final two games of this series, they arguably have their best chance to get out of it with back-to-back wins for the first time since mid-April.

While the deciding plays have been different each day, their past six losses have come with two runs or less scored from their lineup. Friday continued their recent struggles against left-handers, with seven strong innings from Oakland southpaw Tommy Milone (5-2).

"We've just got to put it all together," catcher Gerald Laird said. "That's the bottom line. It's tough. There's no excuse. We have a better team than we're showing. Obviously we all know that. We've just got to put it all together."

"It's just frustrating because [Thursday] we get 17 hits, and we come out today against a guy we thought we could get some runs off and we didn't get it done."

They were probably headed towards a defeat before Inge hit his three-run homer off long reliever Duane Below to turn a 5-2 game into an 8-2 runaway. Still, if they're going to turn this series in their favor this weekend, they're almost surely going to have to pitch to Inge better than they have.

They saw Inge punish plenty of fastballs in his time in a Tigers uniform. They've seen him do the same here.

"We figured he'd be locked in this series," Laird said. "I mean, he's a competitor. He got released by this organization and he feels like he has something to prove. That's the nature of the game. He's a competitor. We left some pitches out over the middle of the plate and he didn't miss."

Or as Leyland put it, "He's got a second wind and it's a good thing, obviously, for him."

Most days, the offensive struggles have spoiled some well-pitched games. Friday wasn't one of them, not with four extra-base hits on a night when Rick Porcello (3-3) had trouble keeping the ball low in the strike zone and the A's made him pay early.

While Inge added to his reunion numbers with an RBI single in the opening inning, the bulk of the damage came right above him in the lineup. Kila Ka'aihue continued to defy Detroit's game plan with a pair of hard-hit doubles to the outfield fences, and Josh Reddick had five RBIs with two home runs, including a leadoff shot in the third to put the A's on top for good at 3-2.

"From the get-go, I was out of sync," said Porcello, whose three walks Friday came after walking six in his first six starts. "I wasn't locating the fastball down in the zone. I had a tough time getting the middle of the order out. It's not a good combination for an effective game."

Porcello's four runs on nine hits over five innings ended the Tigers' streak of nine consecutive quality starts. Below, who had been used as a left-handed specialist over his previous couple outings, gave up a walk and a stolen base to Jemile Weeks ahead of Reddick's RBI single in the sixth.

Seth Smith's two-out blooper into short left field brought up Inge, who got a 2-1 fastball from Below and drove it deep into the left-field seats. It marked his fourth home run in 10 games with the Athletics, matching his total as a Tiger since the start of last season.

"It's such a mixed emotional feeling," Inge said. "I want to do well and I want to hit the ball. Every time I get in the box, my mindset is to take a good swing and basically smash the ball, hammer the ball somewhere. But right after it's done, it's like, 'Man, these are my buddies I just messed up a little bit.'"

Add in Inge's grand slam in Thursday's series opener, and he has driven in eight runs over the past two games against his former team. Once Reddick homered again in the seventh, he put Oakland into double digits.

"What else can he do? He's been great," Reddick said. "I don't know what the guys across the way were thinking when they let him go."

The Tigers, meanwhile, have been happy for him to find a place where he could get regular at-bats. After the last two nights, obviously, they've been wishing those at-bats weren't going so well.

Resting hot-hitting Dirks tough for Leyland

May 12, 2012

By Jason Beck / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The way Andy Dirks is hitting, it's not a stretch to say that the Tigers need him. Yet that's the problem with playing him all the time right now.

The Tigers can't risk aggravating his sore hamstring because, well, they need him.

"It's a tough situation to manage right now," manager Jim Leyland admitted Friday afternoon.

Avila's two-run double

The last 24 hours have been a pretty good example why. Leyland lifted Dirks in the seventh inning Thursday night with a 10-2 lead because he didn't like the way Dirks was moving around on a ground-ball single. So he replaced the plus defender and shifted Ryan Raburn from second base to left field.

On Friday, Dirks was back in the lineup as a left-handed bat against A's lefty Tommy Milone. It was just his second start against a left-handed pitcher this season.

Leyland doesn't feel like he really has to hide Dirks against lefties, but ever since his hamstring acted up rounding third base in mid-April, Leyland has decided those were the best games to give Dirks a break and not risk further injury.

Plus, Dirks' fit into the second spot in the order leaves Leyland extra hesitant to make a change. His four-hit performance Thursday improved him to 10-for-17 in the No. 2 spot this season, including two doubles, two home runs and five RBIs.

"He's really a nice player," Leyland said. "It would be really nice if he could settled into this two hole."

Seeing him do that right now would be a welcome surprise, but maybe a stretch, if only for health reasons. Still, Leyland said he checked with the team medical staff to see if it would be possible for Dirks to improve healthwise while playing nearly every day. It's possible, Leyland said, but it could take awhile.

Likewise, though, Leyland was told a couple days off really won't make much of a difference.

Marte set to make extended spring appearance

May 12, 2012

By Jason Beck / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Six weeks after Luis Marte strained his left hamstring while pitching in the Tigers' final game of Spring Training, he can see a path back to live action. Whether it eventually gets him that shot at the big leagues that he had earned remains to be seen.

Marte, who had made the Opening Day roster before his injury sidelined him, is scheduled to return to game action at extended spring workouts Saturday in Lakeland, Fla. He'll continue to progress from there as long as he's healthy, but with nearly two months since his last outing, he'll need some time to build his arm strength. Once Marte is ready to progress through the Tigers' developmental system, the team can send him out on a rehab assignment for up to 30 days before they would need to either bring him back to Detroit or option him to an affiliate. An extended spring workout doesn't count against a Minor League rehab assignment.

"I'm sure he'll be all right," manager Jim Leyland said. "He's just got to get on the mound and face some hitters."

Bullpen gets plenty of work despite quality starts

May 12, 2012

By Jason Beck / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The Tigers entered Friday's game against the Athletics with nine consecutive quality starts from their rotation. Yet they don't quite have their bullpen the way they want it. Even Thursday night's gem from Max Scherzer and a 10-run outburst from Detroit's offense wasn't enough to help.

By the time the Tigers finished off Friday's 10-6 win, they had used their entire late-inning combination of closer Jose Valverde, eighth-inning man Joaquin Benoit and setup relievers Phil Coke and Octavio Dotel. And Collin Balester, who hadn't thrown in a game since April 29, threw just two pitches Thursday.

Coke wasn't available Friday, having thrown four times in the previous five days and using 16 pitches Thursday thanks to two infield singles and a walk. Benoit was available but threw 18 pitches Thursday to record his lone out of the game.

Once Brandon Inge's grand slam made it a four-run game, manager Jim Leyland was using his bullpen because he had to, not because he wanted to, as he likes to say. That was more of a problem when the Tigers rotation was struggling to put up effective innings.

"It's kind of a complicated thing that's working itself out now that everything is intact," Leyland said.

Avila to return for last two games vs. A's

May 12, 2012

By Jason Beck / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Alex Avila was out of the Tigers lineup for the third time in four days, but manager Jim Leyland characterized it as more of a matchup move than an injury concern, saying he'll be in the lineup for the final two games of the series against the Athletics.

Avila sat Friday against Oakland lefty Tommy Milone, giving Gerald Laird his third start of the week. Avila missed Tuesday and Wednesday night at Seattle with patellar soreness in his left knee.

That knee, Avila said Friday, feels "night and day" better than it did a couple days ago. He should be able to keep it that way if he maintains his training program to strengthen the muscles around the knee.

Kelly's family looks forward to series vs. Bucs

May 12, 2012

By Jason Beck / MLB.com

DETROIT -- Mother's Day is this Sunday across America, and Carrie Kelly will be like a lot of other wives being thanked by her husband, Don Kelly, the Tigers' super-utility man. For her, though, the big May event comes later this month.

See, Carrie Kelly is the former Carrie Walker, a Pittsburgh-area native and girls basketball star. Her father, Tom Walker, pitched for the Tigers in 1975, midway through a six-year Major League career. Her brother, Neil Walker, is the second baseman for their hometown team, the Pirates.

Her two sons -- and Don's two sons, of course -- have an interesting conflict of interest whenever the Tigers and Pirates face each other. Lately, this has happened quite often.

Two years ago, when the Pirates came to Detroit, she helped sew together half of a Tigers shirt with half of a Pirates shirt, ironed part of Kelly's No. 32 and part of Walker's No. 18, and put it on their oldest son, Brett. Last year, they got to stay close to home in Pittsburgh, go to PNC Park and root for the Tigers.

This year, they'll have six Tigers-Pirates games -- three at Comerica Park on May 18-20, then three at PNC Park in mid-June, which means two series with divided loyalties.

"Who does she root for? I think that it would be safe to say that she roots for the Tigers," Kelly said, "but she roots for Neil to get a hit. Just one. Not like that first night in Pittsburgh last year, when he went like 3-for-4 with five RBIs."

It was actually 2-for-5, but he did have five RBIs.

Still, Kelly said, "That's out of the question. One knock would be good for him."

The Walkers, like the Kellys, are an athletic family, which is how the couple met years ago. Don Kelly was just drafted by the Tigers and following his younger sister, Ashlee, during her college basketball career at Quinnipiac University, where she was Northeast Conference Player of the Year and led all Division I players in rebounding as a senior.

At the time, Carrie Walker was an opponent at Wagner College, where she was an all-conference player as well, but also a friend from their high school days in western Pennsylvania. One day at a Quinnipiac-Wagner game, Don and Carrie met through Ashlee, and the relationship began.

Carrie Walker played professional basketball for a season in Ireland before coming home and eventually getting married. Now, they have two sons and a baseball family of their own.

"She understands the commitment that it takes, the sacrifices that take place," Kelly said. "It's huge. She understands, obviously, what it's like to be an athlete, not to mention the fact that she grew up in a baseball family. Not only was she an athlete, but she understands the whole baseball lifestyle and the travel and all the things that go on throughout the season."

In the offseason, they're classic Pittsburghers, going to Penguins and Steelers games every now and then, while trying to keep track of two energetic young athletes-in-waiting. Once the season begins, though, they're Detroiters.

As Don Kelly readily admits, it takes a ton of energy just to keep track of the kids.

"She goes through a lot on a daily basis," he said.

Tigers sound off on loss to Oakland

May 12, 2012

By Staff / Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) -- Jim Leyland is getting quite the view of a suddenly productive Brandon Inge, in the other dugout, beating his former Tigers.

Inge hit a three-run homer and drove in four runs for the fourth time in five games, Josh Reddick homered twice and had a career-high five RBIs, and the Oakland Athletics pounded Detroit 11-4 on Friday night.

"He's really swinging well right now. He's got a second wind, and it's a good thing obviously for him," said Leyland, Detroit's manager. "He's swinging the bat as good as I've seen him swing it for a while. He's in a pretty good groove right now."

Inge sent a 2-1 pitch into the elevated left-field bleachers in the sixth inning for his fifth homer of the year and fourth since joining the A's on April 30 after the Tigers cut him. It was his second longball in two nights after he hit a grand slam in Thursday's 10-6 loss. Inge also delivered a game-ending grand slam on Tuesday against Toronto.

"What else can he do?" Reddick said of Inge. "He's been great. I don't know what those guys across the way were thinking when they let him go."

Inge insists he hasn't been this good over such a short stretch even in a video game. Inge became the first player with four games of four or more RBIs in a five-game stretch since Lou Gehrig in 1931, according to information provided by the A's from the Elias Sports Bureau.

Inge's big bat backed Tommy Milone (5-2), who struck out six in seven innings to win for the fourth time in five starts and become Oakland's first pitcher with five victories this year. He retired the final 10 batters he faced in order.

Miguel Cabrera singled twice and drove in two runs for the Tigers, who haven't won consecutive games since a four-game winning streak from April 15-18 -- when Inge was still with the club.

"The way I was last year and early this year, it seemed like when I did get good wood on the ball it went right at somebody," Inge said. "So there is a flip side of it, things should usually balance out. When things go like this and you get hot you feel like you get all the breaks. But I also know things don't go like this all the time."

Reddick hit a solo homer in the third and a three-run shot in the seventh for his first career two-homer game, and he matched his career best with four hits. Seth Smith doubled among his three hits and Kila Ka'aihue doubled twice and scored two runs for Oakland, which evened the four-game series by scoring its most runs of season. The A's outhit the Tigers 13-8 on the way to their first double-digit run total of 2012.

Inge let his old team have it again.

"I don't know what to say about that," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "It's been phenomenal."

Inge was acquired by Oakland to fill a void at third base after the A's tried several options at the spot following Scott Sizemore's season-ending knee injury at the start of spring training. Inge is doing plenty at the plate, too. This marked his 14th career game with four or more RBIs -- and he received a nice ovation from the crowd of 26,721 at the Coliseum after flying out to the warning track in center in the eighth on a warm spring night in the Bay Area.

Inge was released by the Tigers on April 26 after batting .100 (2 for 20) with one home run and two RBIs in nine games this season. Inge, who turns 35 on May 19, joined his first new team in his 12th major league season.

"It's good to feel wanted. That's an important thing," Inge said. "The other part is coming into this group of guys, there's not one guy on this team who has given me a hard time, if it's not joking. The whole attitude of this ballclub is very much laid back, but at the same time you step between the lines and it's very much business."

Milone fell behind 1-0 in the first after allowing Cabrera's double-play grounder, but the A's answered in the bottom half against Rick Porcello (3-3). Reddick hit a two-out single and Ka'aihue doubled him home. Inge added an RBI single two batters later.

Leyland's Detroit lineup, featuring two left-handed hitters with slugger Prince Fielder batting cleanup and Andy

Dirks in the No. 2 hole, couldn't hang in what became a hitting show by the suddenly powerful A's. They came into the game as the second-lowest scoring team in the American League.

Porcello was tagged for nine hits and four runs in five innings, falling to 12-5 with a 2.85 ERA in 17 career starts in May.

"From the get-go I was out of sync. I wasn't locating the fastball down in the zone," Porcello said. "I had a tough time getting the middle of the order out. It's not a good combination for an effective game."

Inge and Co. sure are taking some pressure off ailing rookie A's cleanup hitter Yoenis Cespedes, who missed his fourth straight game after straining the top of his left hand before Tuesday's game, when he was a late scratch.

NOTES: Tigers catcher Alex Avila got the night off, with Gerald Laird starting in his place. Leyland said with a lefty starter, it was a good time to rest Avila and his sore left knee. ... Dirks is still dealing with a troublesome hamstring. "I'd really like to settle him into that 2 spot, but he's really not running full speed," Leyland said. "I'm a little concerned about it." Leyland said the team's athletic trainer told him Thursday night Dirks can play through the problem and still be 100 percent. ... Detroit RHP Luis Marte, on the DL with a strained left hamstring, was set to face hitters in extended spring training Saturday in Lakeland, Fla.

Tigers' big 3rd inning leads win over Athletics

May 12, 2012

By Dana Wakiji / FOXSportsDetroit.com

Just when you thought Max Scherzer and the suddenly prolific offense would be the entire story of the Tigers' 10-6 victory over the Oakland A's, a former Tiger had to make sure he was part of the tale as well.

But before we get to Brandon Inge, the man Tigers fans love to hate, Scherzer's outing requires some attention. Scherzer followed up his excellent start against the Chicago White Sox (one run allowed in seven innings with no walks and nine strikeouts) with another good one in Oakland.

Scherzer allowed two runs on five hits in 6 1/3 innings while walking two and striking out another nine, improving to 2-3 with a 5.73 ERA. That may not sound spectacular but it's a lot better than the 7.77 ERA he had three starts ago.

Plus, it showed that Scherzer was able to repeat the fix he made of the mechanical flaw he and pitching coach Jeff Jones found in his delivery.

It also marked the ninth straight quality start for a member of the Tigers' rotation.

The sputtering offense came to life, sparked by Andy Dirks and Miguel Cabrera, each with four hits. Dirks drove in the game's first run, a solo shot off Bartolo Colon in the first inning.

Dirks now leads the Tigers with a .383 average. He has three home runs and 11 RBIs.

"I feel pretty good at the plate right now," Dirks told FOX Sports Detroit's Mickey York on the post-game show. "It comes and goes, it goes in phases but I'm just trying to stay focused as much as I can with every at-bat, every single pitch, trying to help my team win some games."

Cabrera, who was 0-for-13 against the Seattle Mariners, had three RBIs after taking extra batting practice and finding that he had his hands too high at the plate.

"I figured out what I'm doing wrong, why I miss a lot of pitches, my swing was too long, I tried to shorten my swing, try to make better contact with the ball and good things happen," Cabrera told York on the field after the game.

Colon proved to be just the tonic the Tigers' hitters were looking for. Colon has not beaten the Tigers since April 13, 2003.

In the third inning, every Tiger reached base and scored except for Ryan Raburn, who is still struggling. The A's saw their 2-1 lead (from Kila Ka'iahue's two-run home run) turn into a 9-2 Tigers lead. Colon lasted just 2 1/3 innings.

"It was important for us," Tigers manager Jim Leyland told York. "Hopefully it'll loosen the guys up a bit.

Hopefully we can get on a little bit of a roll, particularly offensively. Those guys that came out today and hit extra, they did pretty well today. It was nice to get some runs on the board."

Octavio Dotel rebounded from a wildly blown save in his last outing to finish the seventh.

That's when things got a little more interesting. Phil Coke allowed a couple of infield hits and a walk. Collin Balester, who had not pitched since April 29 in New York, came in to face Inge.

Inge, who had a walk-off grand slam two games ago, hit Balester's fastball out to right field for another grand slam. Unbelievably, Inge is already third in RBIs for Oakland. The only other A's player to hit two grand slams in three games was Hall of Famer Jimmie Foxx in September of 1932.

Inge also had a defensive gem on the first play of the game, a hot shot off the bat of Austin Jackson. The two are good friends and both had smiles after the play.

Unfortunately, the Tigers needed to use both Joaquin Benoit and Jose Valverde in a non-save situation to finish the game, but Scherzer was good again, the offense came to life and Inge's blast didn't hurt his former team.

Now all the Tigers need is to put together two victories in a row for the first time since April 15-18 (one win at Chicago and a three-game sweep in Kansas City).

"You never know. We've got to come out tomorrow and swing the bats well again," Dirks said. "One game, it doesn't matter if you score one run and win or if you score 20 runs and win, you've got to be good for the next game. Whatever it takes to win ballgames, that's what we're trying to do."

Saturday, May 12, 2012

Team	Player	Transaction
Philadelphia Phillies	Mike Fontenot	Purchased From Minors
Philadelphia Phillies	Michael Martinez	Transferred to 60-Day DL, (Fractured right foot)
Tampa Bay Rays	Jose Lobaton	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation

Friday, May 11, 2012

Team	Player	Transaction
Baltimore Orioles	Dana Eveland	Purchased From Minors
Baltimore Orioles	Matt Lindstrom	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Strained ligament in right middle finger)
Boston Red Sox	Scott Podsednik	Traded From, Philadelphia (for cash considerations)
Chicago White Sox	Jesse Crain	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation
Colorado Rockies	Josh Outman	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Strained oblique)
Colorado Rockies	Josh Outman	Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment
Colorado Rockies	Drew Pomeranz	Sent to Minors
Los Angeles Angels	Chris Iannetta	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Right wrist surgery - out 6-8 weeks)
Los Angeles Angels	John Hester	Purchased From Minors
Los Angeles Dodgers	Jerry Hairston Jr.	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Left hamstring strain)
Los Angeles Dodgers	Justin Sellers	Called Up from Minors
New York Mets	Ronny Cedeno	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Left intercostal strain)
New York Mets	Ronny Cedeno	Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment
New York Mets	Vinny Rottino	Sent to Minors
New York Yankees	Eric Chavez	Removed from 7-Day DL, (Concussion)
New York Yankees	Eduardo Nunez	Sent to Minors
Oakland Athletics	Collin Cowgill	Called Up from Minors
Oakland Athletics	Michael Taylor	Sent to Minors
Oakland Athletics	Jim Miller	Sent to Minors
Oakland Athletics	Andrew Carignan	Called Up from Minors
Philadelphia Phillies	Layne Nix	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Strained left calf)

Philadelphia Phillies	Hector Luna	Purchased From Minors
Philadelphia Phillies	Jake Diekman	Called Up from Minors
Philadelphia Phillies	Justin De Fratus	Transferred to 60-Day DL, (Right elbow sprain)
Philadelphia Phillies	Erik Kratz	Sent to Minors
Philadelphia Phillies	Brian Sanches	Outrighted to Minors
Philadelphia Phillies	Raul Valdes	Purchased From Minors
Pittsburgh Pirates	Jeff Larish	Traded From, Boston (for cash considerations)
San Diego Padres	Joe Wieland	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Strained right elbow)
San Diego Padres	James Darnell	Called Up from Minors
San Francisco Giants	Shane Loux	Purchased From Minors
San Francisco Giants	Ryan Theriot	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Right elbow inflammation)

Thursday, May 10, 2012

Team	Player	Transaction
Baltimore Orioles	Steve Tolleson	Purchased From Minors
Baltimore Orioles	Taylor Teagarden	Transferred to 60-Day DL, (Lower back strain)
Baltimore Orioles	Endy Chavez	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Strained left oblique)
Baltimore Orioles	Tommy Hunter	Called Up from Minors
Boston Red Sox	John Maine	Released
Boston Red Sox	Justin Thomas	Designated for Assignment
Boston Red Sox	Daniel Nava	Purchased From Minors
Colorado Rockies	Jeremy Guthrie	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation
Miami Marlins	Mike Dunn	Called Up from Minors
Miami Marlins	Kevin Mattison	Called Up from Minors
Minnesota Twins	Matt Maloney	Designated for Assignment
Minnesota Twins	Darin Mastroianni	Called Up from Minors
Minnesota Twins	P.J. Walters	Purchased From Minors
New York Mets	Ronny Cedeno	Sent to Minors, For Rehabilitation
Pittsburgh Pirates	Joel Hanrahan	Placed on Bereavement/Family Medical Emergency List
Pittsburgh Pirates	Daniel McCutchen	Called Up from Minors

Tampa Bay Rays	Brandon Allen	Placed on 15-Day DL, (Right quad strain)
Tampa Bay Rays	Jeff Keppinger	Reinstated From Restricted List
Toronto Blue Jays	Vladimir Guerrero	Signed to a Minor League Contract