

MLB

Mariners finish off sweep of Athletics

By MICHAEL WAGAMAN
Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Nelson Cruz wasn't nearly as impressed with his latest power display as Seattle teammate Kyle Seager was.

On a day when Seager hit a three-run homer in the first inning to get the Mariners off to a fast start, Cruz trumped him with two towering 400-foot home runs to continue his season-long feast on Athletics pitching.

Seattle beat Oakland 6-3 on Wednesday to complete a two-game sweep.

"It's cool being on deck when he gets hold of one because he can do stuff that there's not a lot of guys can," Seager said of Cruz. "He's a lot of fun to watch and you certainly want him on your team. He's incredible, the stuff he can do."

Robinson Cano had two hits and scored twice while Ben Gamel singled and made another sparkling defensive play to help Seattle to its fourth win in five games.



AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez

Seattle Mariners' Nelson Cruz follows through on his two-run home run against the Oakland Athletics during the third inning of a baseball game Wednesday in Oakland, Calif.

The Mariners, who entered the day tied with Kansas City and Tampa Bay for the second AL wild card, finished 6-3 on their road trip.

Cruz hit a two-run homer in the third, his 25th, then added his 26th in the fifth. It's the second multi-homer game in four days for the Mariners slugger, who has 22 RBIs in 13 games against the A's this season — a Seattle record against Oakland.

"I can't explain it," Cruz said. "You go to all the ballparks and

you don't feel it. I guess luck."

Seager homered in the first after Jean Segura and Cano singled.

All three home runs came off Oakland starter Jharel Cotton (5-9).

Khris Davis hit his 31st home run and Matt Joyce also homered for the A's, one day after returning to the lineup following a two-game suspension for using an anti-gay slur.

Emilion Pagan (1-2) pitched one-hit ball over 2 2/3 innings in

relief of starter Yovani Gallardo to earn his first career win.

Edwin Diaz retired three batters for his 25th save.

Gallardo was knocked out of the game in the fifth inning after allowing three runs and six hits.

The Mariners, who went into the day with 67 errors, made two defensive gems.

Gamel made a leaping catch while crashing into the left-field wall to rob Marcus Semien of a hit in the fourth inning, the latest in a string of stellar plays from the rookie outfielder. Center fielder Jarrod Dyson also made a leaping catch near the wall in center in the first inning.

"There were some subtle plays that kept us down a little bit," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "Our bats weren't great in the middle of the game but if one of those breaks goes one way or the other, now we're looking at a different ballgame. But they didn't so it was a great play."

Cotton, winless since June 23, allowed six runs and eight hits over six innings.

UP NEXT

Mariners: LHP James Paxton (12-3, 2.70 ERA) pitches in the opener of a four-game series against the Angels on Friday night in Seattle. Paxton leads the AL and is tied for second in the majors with 113 wild pitches.

NFL

Seahawks rave about potential of Shaquill Griffin

By TIM BOOTH
Associated Press

RENTON, Wash. — Even though he's now a professional, Shaquill Griffin is still receiving an intense education.

And in this scenario, Richard Sherman is one of the primary instructors.

"He's mentally sharp. That's really, really unique for a rookie to be that mentally sharp and mentally on it," Sherman said. "He's incredibly coachable. He does a great job of just being coachable and when they correct a mistake then he makes sure he makes the corrections."

There are very few questions surrounding the starters for the Seattle Seahawks when the season begins Sept. 10 at Green Bay. The cornerback opposite Sherman, though, is one of those and perhaps the most important to answer in the weeks leading up to the regular season.

It became an issue when starter DeShawn Shead suffered a torn ACL in his left knee during Seattle's playoff loss to Atlanta. Shead needed a small follow-up procedure that delayed his return even further.

Enter the rookie Griffin, Seattle's third-round selection out of Central Florida, who is



In this June 15, 2017, file photo, Seattle's Shaquill Griffin, and Richard Sherman talk between drills at practice in Renton, Wash.

AP Photo/Elaine Thompson, File

competing with veteran Jeremy Lane for the starting role opposite Sherman.

"I'm getting a lot of help from Richard and you know, every now and then I get the chance to move a little faster," Griffin said. "Now I'm starting to get the hang of it. The game is starting to slow down for me."

Griffin was a priority pick for the Seahawks. There were other options Seattle could have taken earlier in the draft, but the Seahawks liked Griffin's mix of size at 6-feet and speed.

For all the certainty in Seattle's standout secondary, the spot opposite Sherman has proven troubling since Byron Maxwell left as a free agent following the 2014 season. Cary Williams was brought in for the 2015 season, only to be benched and

eventually cut later. Shead, a converted safety, was more than adequate last season while regularly getting picked on as teams avoided Sherman, but his knee injury altered Seattle's plans.

Lane is experienced and coach Pete Carroll has noted an improved maturity going into his sixth season. But Lane has proven most effective working as a slot cornerback in nickel packages, meaning Seattle needs a solution on the outside — at least in obvious passing situations.

And while Neiko Thorpe and DeAndre Elliott have shown potential, Griffin seems to be generating the most excitement.

"There is just nothing but positives and we have never had a guy that runs this fast that is this big, so right now it is all about technique and he has no problem

with it," Carroll said. "But he will get a lot better. He will understand situations and the application of technique much more so. It's just going to take time."

The biggest technique for Griffin to learn is Seattle's step-kick style of press coverage at the line of scrimmage. The goal there is to avoid having to play chase with a wide receiver by being patient at the line of scrimmage and making sure to move the feet first before using hands. It's not easy, as evidenced by the number of cornerbacks that have struggled in Seattle's system.

"I was so used to being so aggressive and as soon as the receiver moved I put my hands on first and my hips lock," Griffin said. "Sometimes, when I was back in college, that's how receivers got behind me. Now that I'm starting to learn, it's easy for me to stay over to the top and guarding receivers is a lot easier."

Because Seattle knows what is has with Lane, it's expected Griffin will get significant playing time early in the preseason, beginning with Sunday's opener against the Los Angeles Chargers.

"You can't be average here," Griffin said. "You got to be ready to work and that's the only thing that's different right now, but nothing that I can't handle."

Auto Racing

Byron replaces Kahne at Hendrick Motorsports in 2018

Associated Press

CONCORD, N.C. — A racing fan who grew up in North Carolina, William Byron remembers peering into windows at Hendrick Motorsports.

He saw cars built for Jeff Gordon, Jimmie Johnson and Dale Earnhardt Jr., NASCAR's biggest stars during Byron's 19 years.

Soon, he will be on the opposite side of the glass.

Hendrick Motorsports announced Wednesday that Byron will replace Kasey Kahne in the No. 5 Chevrolet beginning in 2018, giving the teenager a top-tier Cup Series ride for one of NASCAR's most accomplished teams. Byron is scheduled to

make his Cup debut at Daytona in February.

"It's pretty cool to be in the other side of the picture," Byron said.

Byron, who will turn 20 in November, is in his first season in the second-tier Xfinity Series. He has three wins, including ones at Daytona and Indianapolis, and currently ranks second in points while driving for Hendrick-allied JR Motorsports. He also won seven times — a record for a rookie — in the Truck Series in 2016.

"You can't teach speed and you can't train talent," Hendrick said. "And he has all those other qualities: Smart, dedicated, culture,



Byron

work ethic. He's got the whole package."

Byron will join seven-time champion Johnson, Chase Elliott and Alex Bowman in Hendrick's four-car Cup lineup next season. Instead of the star-studded group that featured Gordon, Johnson and Earnhardt a few years ago, the team will have three drivers under the age of 25 and Johnson, who will turn 42 next month.

"I don't really have much of a concern," said Hendrick, adding that Johnson will be a mentor while Gordon and Earnhardt will still have roles with the organization. "So they've got a lot of

coaches. But the main thing is just not putting too much pressure on them and letting them go out and learn.

"If William continues to do what he's done in every series he's been in, he'll adapt fine and he will learn. You might as well let him learn in what he's going to be driving for years to come."

Kahne and Hendrick agreed to part ways Monday, just weeks after Kahne earned a playoff spot by winning the Brickyard 400. Hendrick said Wednesday that his former driver remains under contract for another year and likely will land at an "alliance" program next season.

Byron's car will be sponsored by Axalta Coating Systems and Liberty University.

SCOREBOARD

Baseball				
MLB				
AMERICAN LEAGUE				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	65	49	.570	—
New York	60	52	.536	4
Tampa Bay	58	57	.504	7½
Baltimore	56	58	.491	9
Toronto	53	60	.469	11½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	60	51	.541	—
Kansas City	57	56	.504	4
Minnesota	56	56	.500	4½
Detroit	52	61	.460	9
Chicago	43	68	.387	17
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	71	42	.628	—
Seattle	59	56	.513	13
Los Angeles	57	58	.496	15
Texas	54	59	.478	17
Oakland	50	64	.439	21½
Wednesday's Games				
Colorado 3, Cleveland 2, 12 innings				
Texas 5, N.Y. Mets 1				
Seattle 6, Oakland 3				
L.A. Angels 5, Baltimore 1				
N.Y. Yankees 11, Toronto 5				
Boston 8, Tampa Bay 2				
Detroit 10, Pittsburgh 0				
Chicago White Sox 7, Houston 1				
Minnesota 4, Milwaukee 0				
St. Louis 8, Kansas City 5				
N.Y. Yankees (Gray 6-6) at Toronto (Estrada 4-7), 4:07 p.m.				
Cleveland (Salazar 4-5) at Tampa Bay (Snell 0-6), 4:10 p.m.				
Kansas City (Hammel 5-9) at St. Louis (Lynn 10-6), 5:15 p.m.				
Houston (Peacock 10-1) at Chicago White Sox (Rodon 1-4), 5:10 p.m.				
Minnesota (Gibson 6-9) at Milwaukee (Davies 13-5), 5:10 p.m.				
Baltimore (Miley 5-9) at Oakland (Blackburn 3-1), 7:05 p.m.				
L.A. Angels (Skaggs 1-2) at Seattle (Paxton 12-3), 7:10 p.m.				
NATIONAL LEAGUE				
East Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Washington	67	45	.598	—
Miami	53	59	.473	14
Atlanta	51	61	.455	16
New York	50	61	.450	16½
Philadelphia	42	69	.378	24½
Central Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Chicago	59	54	.522	—
Milwaukee	59	57	.509	1½
St. Louis	58	56	.509	1½
Pittsburgh	56	58	.491	3½
Cincinnati	47	67	.412	12½
West Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	80	33	.708	—
Colorado 6, Arizona 2				
San Diego 50, St. Louis 42				
San Francisco 46, Texas 35				
Wednesday's Games				
Colorado 3, Cleveland 2, 12 innings				
Texas 5, N.Y. Mets 1				
San Francisco 3, Chicago Cubs 1				
Washington 10, Miami 1				
Cincinnati 8, San Diego 3				
Detroit 10, Pittsburgh 0				
Philadelphia 3, Atlanta 2				
Minnesota 4, Milwaukee 0				
St. Louis 8, Kansas City 5				
L.A. Dodgers 3, Arizona 2				
Thursday's Games				
San Diego (Lamet 6-4) at Cincinnati (Castillo 2-5), 9:35 a.m.				
Pittsburgh (Cole 9-8) at Detroit (VerHagen 0-1), 10:10 a.m.				
Miami (Straily 7-8) at Washington (Roark 9-7), 4:05 p.m.				
N.Y. Mets (deGrom 12-5) at Philadelphia (Velazquez 2-6), 4:05 p.m.				
Kansas City (Hammel 5-9) at St. Louis (Lynn 10-6), 4:15 p.m.				
Minnesota (Gibson 6-9) at Milwaukee (Davies 13-5), 5:10 p.m.				
L.A. Dodgers (Darvish 7-9) at Arizona (Banda 1-1), 6:40 p.m.				
MLB				
Northwest League				
Wednesday's Games				
Boise 10, Eugene 2				
Salem-Keizer 4, Hillsboro 3				
Everett 8, Spokane 7				
Vancouver 6, Tri-City 2				
Thursday's Games				
Spokane at Everett, 11:05 a.m.				
Tri-City at Vancouver, 1:05 p.m.				
Eugene at Boise, 6:15 p.m.				
Salem-Keizer at Hillsboro, 7:05 p.m.				
Basketball				
WNBA				
Wednesday				
No games scheduled				
Thursday's Games				
San Antonio at Chicago, 5 p.m.				
Phoenix at Dallas, 5:30 p.m.				
Friday's Games				
New York at Atlanta, 4:30 p.m.				
Los Angeles at Minnesota, 5 p.m.				
Golf				
PGA Tour				
Upcoming schedule				
PGA CHAMPIONSHIP				
Site: Charlotte, N.C.				
Course: Quail Hollow Club. Yardage: 7,600.				
Par: 71.				
Purse: TBA (\$10 million in 2016). First prize: TBA (\$1.8 million in 2016).				
Television: Thursday and Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; TNT, Saturday, 8-11 a.m.; TNT Sports; 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; CBS, Sunday, 8-11 a.m.; TNT; 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; CBS.				
Defending champion: Jimmy Walker.				

College Football

SDSU, Boise State favored in Mountain West

By BERNIE WILSON
Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — One week after the NFL's Chargers announced they were relocating to Los Angeles, San Diego State gave a five-year contract extension to coach Rocky Long, who said the Aztecs were more than up to the challenge of winning over the suddenly spurned fan base.

The best way, naturally, is to continue on the course Long has put them on.

The Aztecs are coming off consecutive 11-3 seasons that included Mountain West Conference championships and bowl victories.

They were ranked in the final poll for the first time, finishing at No. 25 in The Associated Press Top 25.

"I think we've got a really good team," the 67-year-old Long said. "I think we're going to play well and I think we've got a chance to win another conference championship."

To do that, they'll likely have to get past Boise State. The Aztecs didn't face the Broncos the last two regular seasons or in the Mountain West title games.

SDSU was the unanimous pick to win the West Division again and the Broncos were picked to win the Mountain Division.

The Aztecs will host the Broncos on Oct. 14. They could very well meet again for the league title.

THE FAVORITES

West Division

San Diego State returns only one starting offensive lineman, right guard Antonio Rosales, so the unit will have to quickly gel to open holes for Rashaad Penny, who replaces all-time NCAA rushing leader D.J. Pumphrey, and protect quarterback Christian Chapman. Penny, the two-time MWC postseason special teams player of the year, ran for 1,018 yards and 11 touchdowns last year behind Pumphrey, who gained a school-record 2,133 yards. Pumphrey set the FBS career rushing record with 6,405, passing former Wisconsin star Ron Dayne's mark of 6,397 yards.

Hawaii was picked to finished second behind the Aztecs, based on a 7-7 finish and a victory against Middle Tennessee State in the Hawaii Bowl. The Rainbows had losing records each of the previous five seasons. Linebacker Jahlan Tavai and defensive back Trayvon Henderson were picked to the preseason all-conference team.

Mountain Division

Boise State returns eight starters, including quarterback Brett Rypien and receiver Cedrick Wilson, from a team that went 10-3 and lost to Baylor in the Cactus Bowl. The Broncos have reached double digits in victories twice in coach Bryan Harsin's three seasons.

Colorado State has high expectations, and not just because of a new campus stadium. The Rams were picked to finish second in the Mountain Division, receiving six first-place votes and 135 points in the preseason poll, behind BSU's 21 first-place votes and 161 points. The Rams return 13 starters, including quarterback Nick Stevens and receiver Michael Gallup. Although the Rams finished 7-6, they won four of their last five regular-seasons games, including embarrassing SDSU 63-31 in San Diego.

TOP PLAYERS

Although defending Mountain Division champion Wyoming is picked to finish third, the Cowboys have star power. Quarterback Josh Allen was named the Preseason Offensive Player of the Year while defensive back Andrew Wingard is the Defensive Player of the Year. Allen threw for 3,203 yards and 28 touchdowns and ran for 523 yards and seven TDs. Wingard had 131 total tackles. SDSU's Penny is the Preseason Special Teams Player of the Year, but his impact will come as the Aztecs' featured back.

NEW FACES

Jeff Tedford returns to Fresno State, where he played quarterback and once served as an assistant coach. He is a former head coach at Cal, where he twice was named Pac-10 Coach of the Year, and was Oregon's offensive coordinator for four seasons.

Nevada's Jay Norvell is in his first job as head coach, but he's been an assistant in a BCS national championship game with Oklahoma and a Super Bowl with the Oakland Raiders.

San Jose State's Brent Brennan also is in his first head coaching job. He was an assistant coach with the Spartans from 2005-2010.

ON THE HOT SEAT

Maybe Utah State's Matt Wells, who is coming off consecutive losing seasons after posting winning records his first two years.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Boise State at San Diego State, Oct. 14; Air Force at Colorado State, Oct. 28; Boise State at Colorado State, Nov. 11;