

Beavers aware of Sunday struggles

By **BOB LUNDEBERG**
Albany Democrat-Herald

CORVALLIS (AP) — A culmination of several events led to Oregon State’s historic 2017 baseball season.

The ascendance of Jake Thompson may have been the biggest factor.

Thompson, who is now flourishing in the minor leagues, went 14-1 with a 1.96 earned run average a season ago as the Beavers made the College World Series and finished with a school-record 56 wins. The right-hander from Florence was the team’s No. 3 starter, leading OSU to a 10-0 record in Pac-12 series finales.

Without their departed Sunday stopper, the second-ranked Beavers (42-9-1, 18-8-1) have experienced mixed results this spring behind dependable veterans Luke Heimlich and Bryce Fehmel. OSU is just 3-5-1 in Pac-12 finales entering its matchup with No. 18 UCLA (35-17, 18-9), the final regular-season series for both teams.

“We don’t have a tremendous amount of depth in our starting pitching,” coach Pat Casey said prior to Tuesday’s practice. “It would be nice to have Jake Thompson running out there pitching, but that’s not the reality of baseball.”

Heimlich (13-1, 2.69 ERA) will throw Thursday’s opener, which is scheduled for a 4:05 p.m. first pitch at Goss Stadium. Fehmel (8-1, 2.93) is slated to go Friday with freshman Kevin Abel (3-1, 4.44) likely getting another chance in Saturday’s finale.

Abel worked four shut-out innings last week at USC before running into trouble in the fifth. The right-hander allowed two soft singles and then mishandled a bunt to load the bases with no outs.

He was relieved after 4½ innings, surrendering three runs (two earned) on five hits in an 8-0 loss.

“You couldn’t say it was just one aspect of the game, like pitching or hitting. Honestly, it was both,” Zak Taylor said of

the USC shutout. “Kevin gave us a great few innings in a start. From an offensive perspective we’ve got to put up some runs.”

Added Casey: “I thought Abel threw real well last week. His issues had nothing to do with pitching.”

Grant Gambrell opened Pac-12 play as OSU’s Sunday starter and regularly struggled to pitch deep into games. After Gambrell’s poor showing at Washington State, Abel has started the last two

finales against Stanford and USC.

If necessary, Casey said Abel would’ve been used in relief at USC with Christian Chamberlain likely throwing the finale. Casey officially listed Saturday’s starter as TBA, but noted that “I don’t know anybody else that would be a guy to put in that position.”

“We’re not a team right now that has three starters, and we’ve been kind of like that,” Casey added. “Sometimes when you’ve got (Ben) Wetzler, (Jace) Fry and (Andrew) Moore running out there, it’s an easy decision ... but we don’t have that luxury this year.”

BATTLING DISTRACTIONS

Oregon State is used to playing in front of large quantities of scouts and spectators, but Casey said the USC trip was on another level.

“There are so many things that are out there for kids today, we talk about it all the time,” Casey said. “We were swarmed by scouts and agents and people, and it was like we were at the baseball world of Disneyland down there.”

“In our bullpen, behind our dugout ... you’ve got to block those things out and you’ve got to play. We’ve got some kids that are high-profile kids and those things are things they’ve got to handle, and they’ve done a very good job of it thus far. I have to give them credit because there’s a ton of distractions out there.”

MARINERS: Hernandez lost for just the second time in 19 starts in Oakland

Continued from 1B

Hernandez has a 12.27 first-inning ERA.

“Today was frustrating,” Hernandez said. “You give up four runs and stayed there for six innings, retired the last 16 out of 17, with the same stuff that I got in the first inning. So I don’t know what’s going on in the first. I just have figure out how to be better in the first inning. I don’t know.”

“I have to sit down with (pitching coach) Mel (Stottlemire Jr.) and see what he’s got for me.”

Hernandez lost for just the second time in 19 starts in Oakland. He hadn’t lost at the Coliseum since April 30, 2015.

Oakland helped itself by turning a team record-tying five groundball double plays and stopped a five-game home skid.

“We had some chances,” Mariners manager Scott Servais said. “The double-play balls really killed us today. We had chances to put more up there. Just didn’t happen.”

Yusmeiro Petit (2-1) pitched three scoreless innings in relief. He was among five A’s pitchers manager Bob Melvin used

after saying it would be a bullpen day with rookie reliever Josh Lucas making a spot start.

“Using guys multiple innings was key for us today, and Petit giving us three was great,” A’s manager Bob Melvin said.

Lucas lasted just two innings in his first career start, allowing two runs on three hits and three walks and throwing 52 pitches. The Mariners loaded the bases with no outs in the first, but managed just one run as Nelson Cruz grounded into a double play and Kyle Seager struck out.

Seager hit an RBI double off Blake Treinen in the eighth. Treinen got Daniel Vogelbach to fly out to end the inning with runners at second and third, and worked the ninth for his 11th save.

Jed Lowrie hit a sacrifice fly in the first, Piscotty doubled and Dustin Fowler had an RBI single.

“It was big,” Fowlers said of the A’s avoiding a sweep. “We had a good road trip and then we come in and we lost two, so it’s nice to get this win, so hopefully we can get the edge going and finish out this homestand strong.”

MLB panel says baseballs are getting extra lift, cause unknown

By **RONALD BLUM**
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Baseballs really have been getting extra lift since 2015, and it’s not from the exaggerated uppercuts batters are taking, according to a 10-person committee of researchers hired by the commissioner’s office.

“The aerodynamic properties of the ball have changed, allowing it to carry farther,” said committee chairman Alan Nathan, professor emeritus of physics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

But the panel, which includes professors specializing in physics, mechanical engineering, statistics and mathematics, struck out trying to pinpoint the cause.

The committee’s 84-page report was released Thursday by Major League Baseball. There was no evidence of meaningful change in the bounciness of the balls, formally called coefficient of restitution (COR), or alteration in batters’ swings, such as uppercutting.

As for what caused of the change in aerodynamic properties, it remains baseball’s great mystery, the sport’s equivalent of the search for the Loch Ness Monster.

“We have to admit and we do admit that we do not understand it. We know the primary cause is the change in the drag but we just simply cannot pinpoint what feature of the ball would lead to it,” Nathan said during a conference call Wednesday ahead of the report’s release. “Therefore it was probably is something very, very subtle in the manufacturing process but again it has to be pretty subtle, because if it weren’t, we would have found it.”

Physicist Leonard Mlodinow, in an executive summary accompanying the report, speculated “manufacturing advances that result in a more spherically symmetric ball could have the unintended side effect of reducing the ball’s drag.”

The major league average of home runs per game for both teams combined climbed from 1.90 before the 2015 All-



AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill, File

Los Angeles Angels’ Albert Pujols, right, hits a solo home run in front of Baltimore Orioles catcher Caleb Joseph, left, and home plate umpire Roberto Ortiz during the first inning of a May 2 game in Anaheim, Calif.

Star break to 2.17 in the second half, then rose to 2.31 in 2016 and a record 2.51 last season. The percentage of batted balls resulting in home runs rose from 3.2 percent in 2014 to 3.8 percent in 2015 to 4.4 percent in 2016 and 4.8 percent in 2017.

“We found a consistent picture that the drag coefficient is a little bit smaller as we progressed through 2015 into ‘16 into ‘17,” Nathan said. “Finally, we used our physics expertise to conclude that the small change we found in the average drag coefficient going throughout the period 2015 to 2017 was completely consistent with the change in the number of home runs per batted ball.

“So you’re using partly pure physics, partly a model, partly statistical data about home run distances and things like that, but it all hung together very, very well. So all four of those things point to the fact that it’s the aerodynamic properties of the ball that have changed. So that much we know. What we do not know? Well, what we do not know is what specific measurable property of the ball has led to this change,” he said.

The committee inspected the Rawlings factory that manufactures the balls in Turrialba, Costa Rica, analyzed test data from 2010-17 compiled by Rawlings and the Univer-

sity of Massachusetts Lowell, which has analyzed balls for MLB. The group tested 15 dozen unused balls from 2013-17 and 22 dozen game-used balls from 2012-17. The committee devised new tests conducted at Washington State and examined MLB StatCast data from 2015-17 that included pitch type, exit velocity, launch angle, spray angle, spin rate, spin axis and distance.

MLB announced five steps in response to the report:

—Monitor temperature and humidity of ball storage areas at all 30 ballparks this year and will work with the committee to determine whether to mandate humidors throughout the major leagues in 2019;

—Update production specifications with Rawlings and add specs for aerodynamic properties;

—Develop aerodynamic tests;

—Create standards for mud rubbing, to be enforced by the umpires;

—Form a scientific advisory council.

Balls have been stored in a temperature and humidity controlled environment at Denver’s mile-high Coors Field since 2002 and in the desert at Phoenix’s Chase Field starting this season.

The Official Baseball Rules state balls must be 5-5¼ ounces and 9-9¼ inches in

circumference. Major league balls have rubber pills at the center, wound over by three layers of yarn that is 85 percent wool and 15 percent synthetic, and then a thin layer of cotton. The cover of hide from Tennessee dairy cows is hand-sewn with 108 stitches.

“Rawlings makes baseballs with a much, much, much tighter spec than they are required to do by the actual spec itself,” Nathan said. “So we recommended altering that and tightening up the spec, and so that when you say the ball is within spec, it has some meaning to it, and they followed that recommendation.”

Application of the Lena Blackburn Original Baseball Rubbing Mud, which comes from the New Jersey side of the Delaware River, was not examined. The mud is used by clubhouse attendants to make the balls less slippery.

“There could be some non-uniformity there,” Nathan said. “One of the things that is known to affect the flight of the ball, the carry of the ball, is the roughness of the surface of the ball. That’s why the seams matter, but also the leather part, the white part matters, too, and differences in how that mud is applied could possibly provide a clue to it.”

Nathan would like additional tests on surface roughness and whether pills are off-center.

“There are some smart people who are looking into this drag business, and the hope is that it will be uncovered and we will understand things better,” he said.

In addition to Nathan the committee included Bowling Green statistics professor Jim Albert, Southern California mathematics professors Jay Bartro and Larry Goldstein, Stanford school of Humanities professor Roger Blandford, MIT mechanical engineering and mathematics professor Anette (Peko) Hosoi, CalTech mathematics professor emeritus Gary Lorden, Washington State mechanical and materials engineering professor Lloyd Smith, Dan Brooks of the Brooks Baseball website and Southern Cal Ph.D. student Josh Derenski.

SCOREBOARD

Prep slate

OSAA BASEBALL PLAYOFFS			
6A QUARTERFINALS			
No. 1 Westview vs. No. 8 West Linn, 5 p.m.			
No. 5 West Salem vs. No. 13 West Albany, 5 p.m.			
No. 3 Clackamas vs. No. 6 Central Catholic, 5 p.m.			
No. 7 South Salem vs. No. 15 Sprague, 5 p.m.			
5A QUARTERFINALS			
No. 1 Crescent Valley vs. No. 9 Corvallis, 5 p.m.			
No. 4 Pendleton vs. No. 5 Churchill, 5 p.m.			
No. 3 Crater vs. No. 6 Sandy, 4 p.m.			
No. 7 Bend vs. No. 15 Summit, 4:30 p.m.			
4A QUARTERFINALS			
No. 1 Henley vs. No. 8 Junction City, 4 p.m.			
No. 4 Gladstone vs. No. 5 North Bend, 5 p.m.			
No. 3 La Grande vs. No. 6 Banks, 4 p.m.			
No. 2 North Marion vs. No. 10 Madras, 5 p.m.			
3A QUARTERFINALS			
No. 1 Taft vs. No. 9 Joseph, 1:30 p.m.			
No. 4 La Pine vs. No. 5 Pleasant Hill, 4:30 p.m.			
No. 3 Santiam Christian vs. No. 6 Cascade Christian, 4:30 p.m.			
No. 2 Stanfield vs. No. 10 Horizon Christian, 4 p.m.			
2A/1A QUARTERFINALS			
No. 1 Knappa vs. No. 8 Monroe, 4:30 p.m.			
No. 5 Kennedy vs. No. 13 Oakland, 4:30 p.m.			
No. 3 Pilot Rock vs. No. 6 Sherman, 3 p.m.			
No. 2 Reedsport vs. No. 7 Bandon, 5 p.m.			

OSAA SOFTBALL PLAYOFFS			
Friday's Games			
(Home team listed first)			
6A QUARTERFINALS			
No. 1 Tualatin vs. No. 8 Jesuit, 5 p.m.			
No. 5 Oregon City vs. No. 13 Franklin, 5 p.m.			
No. 3 North Medford vs. No. 11 Tigard, 4 p.m.			
No. 2 Clackamas vs. No. 7 Grants Pass, 4:30 p.m.			
5A QUARTERFINALS			
No. 1 Pendleton vs. No. 8 Ridgeview, 4 p.m.			
No. 4 Marist Catholic vs. No. 5 Hood River, 5 p.m.			
No. 6 Putnam vs. No. 14 Crater, 4:30 p.m.			
No. 7 Hermiston vs. No. 15 Lebanon, 5 p.m.			
4A QUARTERFINALS			
No. 1 La Grande vs. No. 8 Gladstone, 2:30 p.m.			
No. 4 Philomath vs. No. 12 Sweet Home, 5 p.m.			
No. 3 Henley vs. No. 11 North Bend, 3 p.m.			
No. 2 Junction City vs. No. 7 South Umpqua, 4:30 p.m.			
3A QUARTERFINALS			
No. 1 Dayton vs. No. 9 Taft, 5 p.m.			
No. 4 Grant Union vs. No. 5 Clatskanie, 3 p.m.			
No. 3 Rainier vs. No. 6 Glide, TBD			
No. 2 Scio vs. No. 10 Amity, 4:30 p.m.			
No. 1 Toledo vs. No. 8 Bonanza, 3:30 p.m.			
No. 4 Pilot Rock vs. No. 5 Union, 5 p.m.			
No. 3 Central Linn vs. No. 6 Monroe, 4:30 p.m.			
No. 2 Kennedy vs. No. 10 North Douglas, 3:30 p.m.			

Basketball

NBA PLAYOFFS			
CONFERENCE FINALS			
(Best-of-7)			
Thursday's Game			
Houston 98, Golden State 94 (HOU leads 2-2)			
Friday's Game			
Boston at Cleveland, 5:30 p.m. (BOS leads 3-2)			

Saturday's Game			
Houston at Golden State, 6 p.m. (TNT)			
WNBA			
Thursday's Games			
Washington 93, Indiana 84			
Connecticut 102, Los Angeles 94			
Friday's Games			
Minnesota at New York, 4:30 p.m.			
Chicago at Seattle, 7 p.m.			
Saturday's Games			
Dallas at Atlanta, 3 p.m.			
Indiana at Connecticut, 4 p.m.			

Hockey

NHL PLAYOFFS			
STANLEY CUP FINALS			
(Best-of-7; x-if necessary)			
Washington vs. Vegas			
Monday, May 28			
Washington at Vegas, 5 p.m.			
Wednesday, May 30			
Washington at Vegas, 5 p.m.			
Saturday, June 2			
Vegas at Washington, 5 p.m.			
Monday, June 4			
Vegas at Washington, 5 p.m.			
Thursday, June 7			
x-Washington at Vegas, 5 p.m.			
Sunday, June 10			
x-Vegas at Washington, 5 p.m.			
Wednesday, June 13			
x-Washington at Vegas, 5 p.m.			

Baseball

MLB			
AMERICAN LEAGUE			
East Division			
Boston	34	16	.680 —
New York	31	15	.674 1
Tampa Bay	23	25	.479 10
Toronto	23	27	.460 11
Baltimore	16	34	.320 18
Central Division			
Cleveland	24	24	.500 —
Minnesota	21	24	.467 1½
Detroit	21	28	.429 3½
Kansas City	17	33	.340 8
Chicago	15	32	.319 8½
West Division			
Houston	33	18	.647 —
Seattle	29	20	.592 3
Los Angeles	28	22	.560 4½
Oakland	26	24	.520 6½
Texas	20	32	.385 13½
National League			
East Division			
Atlanta	29	19	.604 —
Philadelphia	28	19	.596 ½
New York	25	21	.543 3
Washington	26	22	.542 3
Miami	19	30	.388 10½

Central Division			
Milwaukee	31	20	.608 —
St. Louis	26	21	.553 3
Pittsburgh	27	22	.551 3
Chicago	25	21	.543 3½
Cincinnati	18	33	.353 13
West Division			
Colorado	26	24	.520 —
Arizona	25	24	.510 ½
San Francisco	24	26	.480 2
Los Angeles	22	27	.449 3½
San Diego	21	30	.412 5½
Thursday's Games			
Cincinnati 5, Pittsburgh 4			
N.Y. Mets 5, Milwaukee 0			
Friday's Games			
San Francisco (Holland 2-5) at Chicago Cubs (Hendricks 3-3), 11:20 a.m.			
St. Louis (Sant 1-1) at Pittsburgh (Mugger 0-0), 4:05 p.m.			
Toronto (Gaviglio 1-0) at Philadelphia (Eflin 1-0), 4:05 p.m.			
Atlanta (Teheran 4-1) at Boston (Rodriguez 4-1), 4:10 p.m.			
Washington (Scherzer 7-1) at Miami (Urena 0-7), 4:10 p.m.			
N.Y. Mets (Syndergaard 4-1) at Milwaukee (Guerra 3-3), 5:10 p.m.			
Cincinnati (Romano 2-5) at Colorado (Gray 4-6), 5:40 p.m.			
Arizona (Corbin 4-1) at Oakland (Manaea 5-4), 6:35 p.m.			
San Diego (Richard 3-5) at L.A. Dodgers (Stripling 1-1), 7:10 p.m.			

College Softball

NCAA SOFTBALL TOURNAMENT
SUPER REGIONALS
(Best-of-3; x-if necessary)
Host school is home team for Game 1;
visiting school is home team for Game 2;
coin flip determines home team for
Game 3

FLORIDA 1, TEXAS A&M 0
At Gainesville, Fla.
Thursday: Florida 5, Texas A&M 4
Friday: Florida vs. Texas A&M, 4 p.m.
x-Saturday: Florida vs. Texas A&M, 2 p.m.

KENTUCKY 1, OREGON 0
At Eugene, Ore.
Thursday: Kentucky 9, Oregon 6
Friday: Oregon vs. Kentucky, 8 p.m.
x-Saturday: Oregon vs. Kentucky, 6 p.m.

UCLA 1, ARIZONA 0
At Los Angeles
Thursday: UCLA 7, Arizona 1
Friday: UCLA vs. Arizona, 6 p.m.
x-Saturday: UCLA vs. Arizona, 4 p.m.

GEORGIA VS. TENNESSEE
At Athens, Ga.
Friday: Georgia vs. Tennessee, 2 p.m.
Saturday: Georgia vs. Tennessee, Noon
x-Sunday: Georgia vs. Tennessee, Noon

FLORIDA ST VS. LSU
At Tallahassee, Fla.
Friday: Florida State vs. LSU, 4 p.m.
Saturday: Florida State vs. LSU, 2 p.m.
x-Sunday: Florida State vs. LSU, 1 p.m.

OKLAHOMA VS. ARKANSAS
At Norman, Okla.
Friday: Oklahoma vs. Arkansas, 2 p.m.
Saturday: Oklahoma vs. Arkansas, 10 a.m.
x-Sunday: Oklahoma vs. Arkansas, 10 a.m.

WASHINGTON VS. ALABAMA
At Seattle
Friday: Washington vs. Alabama, 6 p.m.
Saturday: Washington vs. Alabama, 4 p.m.
x-Sunday: Washington at Alabama, 4 p.m.

ARIZONA ST VS. SOUTH CAROLINA
At Tempe, Ariz.
Friday: Arizona State vs. South Carolina,
7 p.m.
Saturday: Arizona State vs. South Carolina,
5 p.m.
x-Sunday: Arizona State vs. South Carolina,
5 p.m.