

Watching it fly



Assistant Coach Tammy Bean watched Cowgirl Leslie Knitig get a hit Tuesday at Centennial Park from her spot as first base coach. The Goodland softball teams were to play at 2 p.m. today in Ulysses. Photo by Doug Stephens/The Goodland Daily News

Arizona's 'Big Unit' throws a two-hitter

PHOENIX (AP) — Arizona manager Bob Brenly didn't plan on having Randy Johnson go the distance against the Colorado Rockies, but the Big Unit left his manager little choice.

Johnson struck out 17 batters and pitched a two-hitter for his major league-leading fifth victory as the Diamondbacks beat the Rockies 7-1 Sunday.

Johnson (5-0) fanned Todd Helton to finish off his sixth game with at least 17 strikeouts. His career high is 20.

Brenly wanted to pull Johnson in favor of closer Byung-Hyun Kim, who had not pitched in a week. But Brenly's conversation with his starter was both brief and futile.

"He said, 'No, I will finish,'" Brenly said. "And I said, 'OK.'"

Three of Johnson's last four pitches to Helton were clocked at 100 mph, and Johnson's fastball hit 101.

"One hundred (mph), 101, 99 and thanks for coming," said Mark Grace, one of five Arizona players to drive in a run. "That's just the way Randy is."

Johnson, who leads the majors with 50 strikeouts in only 39 innings over five starts, also tied teammate Curt Schilling for the most single-game strikeouts in the majors this season.

He walked one and pitched his second complete game.

Johnson received an adrenaline boost in the sixth when he struck out pinch-hitter Terry Shumpert to begin the inning. Shumpert stared back at the mound and Johnson stared at Shumpert, which led to some catcalls from the Colorado dugout.

"It's not important (what was said)," Johnson said. "It helped motivate me."

Grace said he's been on teams that tried bench jockeying against Johnson, only to learn not to bother.

"The best thing you can do is keep your thoughts to yourself," Grace said. "You don't want to go making the big boy angry."

Steve Finley and Damian Miller each hit their fifth homers for Arizona, which won for the eighth time in 10 games.

Juan Pierre led off the game with a single past a drawn-in Grace before Johnson retired 17 of the next 18 Colorado hitters, 12 by strikeout.

"The only bad pitch I made was the first slider I threw to Pierre," Johnson said. "I hadn't established my fastball yet and I felt I didn't need to do him a favor by going off speed."

Pierre came around to score an unearned run on a stolen base and a pair of passed balls, but Finley tied it in the second when he homered into the pool area in right-center field.

The Diamondbacks led 3-1 on a pair of unearned runs in the third, and added single runs in the fourth and fifth against Shawn Chacon (1-3).

That was more than enough for Johnson, who earned his 173rd career double-digit strikeout game. He has 81 career complete games.

Juan Uribe tripled for the Rockies' other hit.

Tony Womack doubled twice for the Diamondbacks, and Luis Gonzalez, Junior Spivey and Grace each had RBI singles. Miller also added an RBI double in Arizona's two-run eighth against Mike James.

Avalanche up two in series

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Having lost the first two games to Colorado, the Los Angeles Kings are in a familiar situation.

A year ago, they recovered from a 2-0 deficit against Detroit to win the first-round series in six games.

"Last year we didn't compete in the first two games in Detroit. We had to have a major adjustment," Kings coach Andy Murray said Sunday. "Here, there is some fine-tuning that needs to be done."

For the Kings to get back into the best-of-seven series with the defending Stanley Cup champion Avalanche, they'll have to make defensive changes beginning Monday night in Game 3 at Staples Center.

"They won't quit, it's not what they're about, and we're aware of that," Colorado defenseman Adam Foote said. "Last year they showed it in the playoffs. They're going to be coming hard."

The biggest adjustments the Kings need to make are against Peter Forsberg and Joe Sakic. Forsberg had a goal and two assists, and Sakic scored twice in Colorado's 5-3 win Saturday in Game 2.

"Joe has been flying through the neutral zone," Los Angeles Kings right wing Adam Deadmarsh said. "We have to be tighter than that so he can't build

up a lot of speed. We're going to have to stick close to him and try to limit his space."

The Kings' defensive breakdowns have come mostly when they've controlled the puck.

"Too many times where we have the puck in our own end, we give them chances," captain Mattias Norstrom said. "They haven't created those chances, we kind of handed it to them."

Los Angeles knows it can score on Colorado goaltender Patrick Roy, having gotten three goals against him in each of the first two games.

"Our offense has been there for us, but we let in too many goals," Norstrom said. "Both games we had a great opportunity to come away with a win. I feel like we're really in this series. We have nothing to fear from the Avalanche."

The Kings had the third-highest scoring defense in the NHL with 157 points during the regular season. Their goals-against average of 2.29 was the lowest in franchise history, but goaltender Felix Potvin has faced 69 shots in the first two games.

The Kings would like to have a couple of low-scoring games, a realistic expectation for two of the league's best defensive teams during the regular season.

"We've been successful this year

just by playing a good defensive game and waiting for our chances, and that's the way we've got to come back," center Ian Laperriere said.

As poorly as the Kings have played on the road, they are undefeated in their last 11 games at home. Game 4 is Tuesday in Los Angeles.

"It's going to be loud and they're going to come out flying, so we need to match that intensity and go right at them," Foote said.

Both teams played the first two games uptempo and got in plenty of hard hits.

"The hits I'm sure will still be there and the teams will crack down more defensively, so I wouldn't be surprised if it was a low-scoring game," Colorado's Dan Hinote said.

Los Angeles' first line of Ziggy Palffy, Jason Allison and Deadmarsh has combined for four goals and five assists, but the Kings haven't gotten much from anyone else.

"The way we have played, we realize we're right there, we can still win the series," Allison said.

"We're not going to change anything offensively, but we got to make some better decisions with the puck defensively. I think you'll see a better team that way Monday," he said.

Forsberg's return has energized the Avalanche.

Kansas loses to Missouri

LAWRENCE. (AP) — W.T. Hoover hit a three-run homer and had a career-high five RBIs as Missouri beat Kansas 16-10 in the first game of a double-header Sunday.

In the second game, Mick Weiss had three runs, four hits and five RBIs — following up on his four hits and two runs in the first game — as the Tigers (19-19, 7-10 Big 12) beat the Jayhawks 14-4 in eight innings.

Jody Roughton had three hits, three runs and three RBIs, including a homer, for Missouri.

Justin James (2-2) held Kansas (16-20, 3-14) to eight hits and four runs, three of them earned, to pick up the win.

Jake Wright, who allowed 12 hits and 10 runs in four innings, got the loss.

In the first game, which was a makeup game for one that was rained out Saturday in Columbia, Mo., Kansas scored three runs in the first inning to take an early lead.

But Hoover hit his three-run homer in the second to give the Tigers a 6-3 edge.

Coach Abdul-Jabbar is star of team

DODGE CITY (AP) — For a newcomer to coaching, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar already speaks the language like a veteran. He says all the right things about how players come first in basketball, and how he's just there to help them get better.

"It's their time on the court now. It's not my time any more," the NBA career scoring leader said Sunday night, after making his professional coaching debut for the Oklahoma Storm of the United States Basketball League.

There's no denying, though, that — at least for now — the Hall of Famer is his team's biggest star, even from the sideline.

When the Storm were introduced before Sunday night's 98-97 loss to the Dodge City Legend, Abdul-Jabbar drew a standing ovation from the standing-room-only crowd of 2,659, a Dodge City Civic Center record.

He acknowledged the applause with a smile and a wave — but later, he tried once more to deflect the attention to his players.

"I'm not bigger than the game," he said. "I hope people come to see the game, not to see me."

And if people do come to see him, Abdul-Jabbar said, he wants them to see him as a coach, not a celebrity. Being a coach is a good thing, he said.

"I'm sure the people who followed my career want to see if this team I've been put in charge of is well-prepared and put in a position to win," Abdul-Jabbar said. "If I have my way, they will be."

Abdul-Jabbar remained low-key for much of the game, preferring to let his

assistants handle the bulk of the coaching duties.

He became more animated and involved as the game wore on — and as the Storm built a 14-point lead midway through the third quarter, only to see it slip away.

They regained the lead, 97-96, on Gabe Frank's 3-pointer with 15.7 seconds left, but Dodge City's Tim Pledger hit two free throws with 7.5 seconds remaining to give the Legend the win.

"I didn't like the outcome, but my guys worked hard and tried to pay attention," Abdul-Jabbar said. "We just made some mental mistakes."

Abdul-Jabbar, who turned 55 on Tuesday, led UCLA to NCAA titles in 1967, 1968 and 1969 when he was known as Lew Alcindor. Along the way, he studied the coaching style of

the Bruins' John Wooden.

"I don't know if any of you ever saw Coach Wooden coach, but he tried to do all of his coaching before the game," Abdul-Jabbar said. "That's my goal, but I have a long way to go before I reach those heights."

Abdul-Jabbar said he hasn't decided whether he'd rather coach in college or the NBA, only that he wants to coach — and feels he's ready to, after stepping away from basketball for more than a decade.

"I love this game, he said. "It's been good to me, and I think I have some things I can give back to it."

Abdul-Jabbar played six NBA seasons with Milwaukee, winning three MVP awards and leading the Bucks to the 1971 championship before being traded to the Los Angeles Lakers before the 1975-76 season.

CONCESSIONS RIGHTS BIDS

The City of Goodland is accepting sealed bids for the concession rights at Centennial Park for the 2002 Recreation season. Bid sheets and a copy of the agreement can be picked up at the City Office, 204 W. 11th. No bids will be accepted after 5 p.m., April 26, 2002.

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