

## A's News Clips, Friday, August 21, 2009

### Pennington hopes his time has arrived with A's

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The 2005 major league draft included first-round picks such as Ryan Braun, Jacoby Ellsbury and Troy Tulowitzki, players who burst through the door in announcing their big league arrival.

Cliff Pennington did so more with a gentle knock.

Pennington, a less heralded member of that draft class, required some labor to climb through the minors. But the work ethic he showed speaks to why the A's think highly of Pennington, a switch-hitting shortstop.

The July 31 trade of Orlando Cabrera signaled the start of Pennington's trial run as the A's starting shortstop. How he fares over the next six weeks figures to influence whether Oakland pursues a free agent to fill the position.

"I still am really excited," said Pennington, whom the A's drafted 21st overall in 2005. "I also understand that you only get a few shots. This seems like it might be mine."

He's hit .270 in 18 games since being recalled from Triple-A Sacramento on the day Cabrera was traded. A speedy runner, he's also stolen three bases.

But primarily his defense will determine whether he enters the 2010 season as the team's No. 1 shortstop.

The first trait often mentioned about Pennington's game — even more so than his strong arm — is his high-energy style of play.

That was a double-edged sword earlier in his pro career, as Pennington often would hit the fast-forward button when a ground ball came his way.

"There would be times when he'd catch the ball, and there'd be huge footprints in the dirt where he got ready to throw," said Keith Lieppman, the A's director of player development. "It was always like he created friction. We've talked to him about being light on his feet. Approach it and get rid of it, like Cabrera."

To improve defensively, Pennington never missed a chance for extra work, Lieppman said. A favorite drill was working with a flat glove — basically fielding with a pingpong paddle — aimed at improving an infielder's hands.

"I can't tell you the thousands of ground balls he's taken with that," Lieppman said.

Manager Bob Geren said he's pleased with the improvement from Pennington, 25, who primarily played second base in his first big league call-up late last year.

The ability to absorb instruction was what first impressed former Texas A&M coach Mark Johnson, whom Pennington played under from 2003-05.

Johnson rated Pennington No. 1 atop a list of talented shortstops he coached with the Aggies, including four-time major league All-Star Chuck Knoblauch.

"Cliff was really something special," said Johnson, now the coach at Sam Houston State. "What separates him is his passion and creativity. He can create plays, make a tough play look easy."

Opinions on Pennington are varied among scouts. There was shared skepticism about his prospects as an everyday shortstop in the majors.

But the A's are determined to find out if Pennington might be a long-term answer.

Bobby Crosby, the team's starting shortstop until Cabrera unseated him in spring training, is likely to leave via free agency. The A's drafted USC shortstop Grant Green with their first-round pick in June, but he's unlikely to factor into the mix until 2011 at the earliest.

Cabrera said upon his trade to Minnesota that he'd consider re-signing with the A's in the winter. Other shortstops who could be available in free agency include two other former Athletics — Marco Scutaro and Miguel Tejada — and Jack Wilson, if Seattle doesn't pick up his \$8.4 million option.

But Pennington has the opportunity to turn heads before the A's even pursue outside options.

He wants to do that in every facet of the game.

"You've got to be able to play defense, No. 1," he said. "But if you're not hitting, they'll find somebody who will."

## **A's shortstop fielding teammates' advice**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Nomar Garciaparra didn't have the easiest task when he came up as Boston's shortstop in 1997. John Valentin, the incumbent at the position, was asked to move to second to make room for Garciaparra, and Valentin was miffed.

"It was definitely awkward," Garciaparra said. "He wasn't happy or pleased. But he never showed that with me. He was extremely helpful to me, he was awesome, and I'll never forget that."

The A's have a mini-version of that going on this month. Onetime shortstop Bobby Crosby felt he should return to the spot when Orlando Cabrera was traded July 31, but the team brought up prospect Cliff Pennington to play shortstop every day. Crosby expressed his displeasure, but like Valentin, he's been purely professional with his successor.

"Bobby isn't jealous or envious," A's second baseman Mark Ellis said. "He wants to see Cliff do well. He's being nothing but supportive."

And because of that, Pennington said, the situation hasn't been uncomfortable.

"Bobby has been great with me," Pennington said. "When I have questions, he's the first one to help me out. I understand him being frustrated, but he's not taking it out on me. He's doing as much as he can to help me get better."

"It's a different situation," Crosby said. "Everyone knows where I stand on it. But that won't stop me from helping out a teammate. There are certain things Cliff's asked about, what to do in some situations, clearing himself when he's turning double plays."

Garciaparra also has helped tutor the 25-year-old, along with Ellis and third baseman Adam Kennedy, all experienced players. It's a gold mine for Pennington to have that kind of expertise to draw on.

Playing with Ellis is particularly a gift for a young player. Ellis is the best defensive second baseman in Oakland history.

"That is a blessing to play next to a second baseman like Mark," A's infield coach Mike Gallego said. "He just makes everyone a better player, and that's going to rub off."

The jury is still out on Pennington as an everyday big-league shortstop. Most scouts believe he'd be an adequate bench player, but few feel he's a frontline shortstop. The A's have been trying to upgrade at the spot, signing Cabrera in the offseason and moving Crosby to a utility role; Cabrera might be an option again this winter. And Oakland's top pick in the June draft was USC shortstop Grant Green, who potentially could be ready by 2011 or 2012.

So will Pennington be the A's starting shortstop next year and thereafter?

"I hope to be, but I understand how the game works," Pennington said. "It can change quickly. I'll try to earn a spot every day."

Pennington definitely has improved in the past year or two; he used to have a lot of excess movement on the field, and he's calmed that down, and the organization believes Pennington has matured a great deal, too. Gallego said he'd like to see Pennington take charge more, but he understands that's not easy with a bunch of established players around him. Next spring, though, Pennington better be the captain of the infield, at least as far as Gallego is concerned.

The positives: Pennington's strong arm is a plus, he makes the routine plays and he always can learn better positioning and situations. His average stands at a respectable .270.

"Cliff is definitely getting his opportunity, and that is something he needs to grab because you don't always get chances like this where you can play every day," Ellis said. "He's being evaluated, and we'll see."

## **A's leading off**

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

**Late call?** When the rosters expand in September, one thing Oakland could use is a third catcher. Top candidate Eric Munson has big-league experience and he's batting .279 with 13 homers and 64 RBIs at Sacramento.

## A's playing well in wake of Holliday trade

### Stability, influx of youth among reasons for recent success

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- When the A's traded star outfielder Matt Holliday and veteran shortstop Orlando Cabrera before the July 31 non-waiver Trade Deadline, the proverbial white flag seemed to be waved.

The players left behind didn't see it.

Despite losing their most feared slugger in Holliday and one of their most respected clubhouse leaders in Cabrera, the A's have played some of their best baseball of the season of late.

For instance, when they upset the visiting Yankees on Monday night, beating A.J. Burnett behind five innings of shutout work from Yankees castoff Brett Tomko, it was Oakland's ninth victory in 14 games.

The young and rebuilding A's went on to lose the final two games of the three-game series before getting Thursday off, but they've played .500 baseball in August after being unable to post a winning record in each of the season's first four months.

Theories abound regarding reasons for the recent surge, with lineup stability and enthusiasm tops among them.

"I think it's a combination of a lot of things," said veteran second baseman Mark Ellis, who was named the American League Player of the Week on Monday. "Everything's kind of settled down now, so the guys who are here kind of know they're going to be here. And I think it always helps having a bunch of young guys, especially this time of year.

"It's hot, and we're playing a lot of games, but these guys are excited to be here, and that rubs off a little bit. We've definitely been playing better than we have in a while. It's nice."

Manager Bob Geren continues to tinker with his batting order virtually every day, but in contrast to the pre-Deadline days, when many players immediately checked the lineup card upon arriving at the clubhouse to see if -- and where -- they were playing, several roles have been more clearly defined.

"It's nice going to work knowing you're going to be in there," said Rajai Davis, who has taken hold of the starting job in center field since Holliday's departure moved Scott Hairston from center to left. "It's one less thing you have to think about. It simplifies everything, and when you simplify things, it makes the game easier."

Davis, a strong defensive outfielder whose base-stealing ability has changed the dynamic of several recent Oakland victories, has been one of the team's hottest hitters of late.

Prior to the Holliday trade, Davis had been a part-time player since joining the A's early last season, claimed off the waiver wire from the Giants.

"The biggest thing, for me, is we're swinging the bats better," Geren said. "We've got some guys, like Elly and Raj, and a few other guys who are really swinging the bat much better these days, and we've had some times this year, earlier, when we didn't have more than one or two guys -- if that -- doing a whole lot.

"We're also getting a little bit more team speed in the lineup more regularly, and obviously Rajai is a big part of that. I think that changes things up and helps quite a bit, too."

Rookie first baseman Tommy Everidge, who was tearing up Triple-A Sacramento before being promoted in late July, also had become something of a mainstay. He's had some ups and downs, as do virtually all rookies, but the release of veteran Jason Giambi and an injury to Daric Barton have allowed Everidge to settle into a regular role.

"It's definitely nice knowing you're probably going to play every day," Everidge said. "Not many guys get called up in July and get that, so you have to try to take advantage of it."

Everidge and Davis couldn't be more opposite in terms of body type -- Davis the Lamborghini to Everidge's John Deere tractor. But they both bring the same type of vibe to the proceedings, and Geren thinks it's been a factor in his team's relative success in grinding through the dog days of summer.

"Any time you have guys getting a nice opportunity to show what they can do with regular playing time, you're going to get that hunger, that energy," Geren said. "There is a certain energetic feel to some of these guys that's carrying over to some of the rest of the guys.

"It's a comfortable energy, too, not over-the-top or anything like that. But it's definitely a different feel than we had earlier in the season, even in the dugout."

## **MINOR LEAGUE NEWS**

### **Chacon deals; Sacramento magic number at 6**

By Nick Hunte, [rivercats.com](http://rivercats.com)

The Sacramento River Cats did not allow the Sounds to make much noise Thursday night as they defeated host Nashville 6-1.

The victory, coupled with Fresno's 6-3 loss at Memphis, drops the River Cats' magic number to clinch the Pacific Coast League South Division to six. Sacramento has now won six straight games while Nashville extended its losing streak to five.

Nashville's only run came off of a line-drive single to left by first baseman Joe Koshansky in the bottom of the first inning. After that, Sacramento starter Shawn Chacon (7-4, 5.60 ERA) pitched six no-hit innings to earn the victory. He finished with four strikeouts, allowing two hits and two walks in 7.0 innings.

The River Cats then rallied in the top of the third inning when they scored four runs. Eric Patterson and Anthony Recker both connected on one-run doubles, Brett Wallace slashed a one-run single and Aaron Cunningham hit a sacrifice fly for a 4-1 lead. The Cats scored two more runs, one in the top of the fourth (Patterson RBI single) and another one in the top of the sixth (Matt Carson homer).

Nashville right-hander Jeff Suppan (0-1, 12.27 ERA) gave up eight hits, five runs and threw three strikeouts in 3.2 innings.

The River Cats will play their last game against Nashville on Friday and hope to sweep their series against the Sounds before coming back home to Raley Field on Saturday to host the Portland Beavers.

### **Leon Continues To Dazzle In Hounds Win**

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

A 20-year-old prospect from Culiacan, Mexico is becoming a major story in the RockHounds' 2009 season, and he wasn't even the pitcher of record in Thursday night's 3-2 win over the Northwest Arkansas Naturals.

Arnold Leon (pronounced lee-OHN) began the year in the RockHounds bullpen, but was sidelined due to arm soreness for a full month (May 15-June 17). In 26 relief appearances, Arnold posted a 4.74 ERA with flashes of brilliance. Then, on August 1, he was given a "spot start" in game two of a double-header at Citibank Ballpark, going 3.0 innings, and combining with Jason Fernandez on the third no-hitter in franchise history. Since he did not pitch deep enough into the game to earn the win, Arnold was credited with a "no decision."

He has now pitched four times as a starter and is perhaps inventing his own statistical category ... "high quality no decision starts." Understandably, the 'Hounds (and Oakland) are keeping a tight reign on Leon's pitch counts. That's why many in the Thursday crowd of 4,385 at Citibank Ballpark were probably a bit befuddled when manager Darren Bush summoned the bullpen with two out in the fifth and the 'Hounds leading, 3-1. Leon had reached his pitch limit for the game (approximately 70 pitches), and that was that.

In four starts ... the first four of his professional career ... Arnold Leon is 0-0, with a 0.54 ERA, allowing eight hits and ONE run in 16-and-two-thirds-innings, with two walks and 14 strikeouts.

The RockHounds trailed, 1-0, with two out and the bases empty in the last of the fifth. Alex Valdez and Matt Sulentic collected back-to-back singles, and Corey Wimberly's double down the left field line tied the game. Jemile Weeks then hit a flair to left-center, with Sulentic and Wimberly scoring on the single.

Josh Donaldson came up big defensively behind the plate, throwing out NW Arkansas' Kurt Mertins on an attempted steal of second after a leadoff single in the fifth ... and getting Jeff Bianchi with one out in the eighth. Bianchi tried to move up on a ball in the dirt, but Donaldson blocked the pitch to the front edge of the batter's circle, grabbed the ball and unloaded a laser of a throw to second base.

Chris Carter went 2-for-4 with a pair of singles and has now hit in 31-of-33 games (he's hitting nearly .450 in that stretch) ... and Shane Peterson went 1-for-3 to extend his on-base streak to 21 games.

Matt Spencer saw his 16-game hit streak snapped, but it took a great play from NW Arkansas second baseman Marc Maddox, who made a diving stop on Spencer's shot up the middle, then tossed to second base for the force out. Matt has hit in 27-of-30 games and is batting over .400 in those 30 ballgames.

### **Texas League South**

The RockHounds got some help from both Tulsa and Arkansas. The Drillers defeated Frisco, 4-2, Thursday night and Arkansas downed Corpus Christi, 2-1, in 12 innings. The Frisco RoughRiders are now four games behind the RockHounds and the Corpus Christi Hooks are six back. San Antonio belted Springfield, 8-3, in a match-up of first half champions, so the Missions remain eight games out. There are 18 games remaining in the regular season (11 at home and seven on the road for the RockHounds).

### **Popcorn, Peanuts, Fresh Cut Grass**

The RockHounds are home at Citibank Ballpark through Monday, August 24, hosting NW Arkansas and Tulsa. Tonight is Pillow Case Night and fireworks follow Saturday night's game.

Reminder: RockHounds Monday-Saturday home games in August and September will start at 6:30 p.m..

For tickets, groups, picnics, youth teams of the night and more ... call the RockHounds office at 520-2255. The Citibank Ballpark box office will be open all day, and through the games, each night of the home stand.

### **RockHounds Radio**

The 'Hounds' new radio home is Jack-FM (102.1-FM). RockHounds broadcasts are also available online. Look for the link to Jack-FM on the RockHounds' web site ... then click "Jack On The Box." Broadcast time from Citibank Ballpark Friday and Saturday is 6:15 p.m.

### **ROCKHOUNDS VS. NATURALS**

Wednesday, August 19th - RockHounds 8 Naturals 0

Thursday, August 20th - RockHounds 3 Naturals 2

Friday, August 21st - Pillow Case Night Travis Banwart (8-5, 4.81) vs. Matt Kniginyzky (5-9, 5.15)

### **ROCKHOUNDS VS DRILLERS**

Saturday, August 22nd - Fireworks Kyle Middleton (3-0, 1.50) vs. Keith Weiser (7-13, 5.52)

Sunday, August 23rd - Family Night Tyson Ross (2-2, 6.33) vs. Samuel Deduno (11-2, 2.72)

Monday, August 24th Graham Godfrey (10-6, 3.72) vs. TBA

## **Ports Falter in Ninth, Lose 4-3 to Nuts**

### **Stockton drops final game in series to Modesto**

**STOCKTON, Calif.**—The Stockton Ports (55-68) had two runners on base in the ninth, but were unable to bring either home, and lost to the Modesto Nuts (68-55), 4-3, on Thursday night in Banner Island Ballpark.

The Ports offense sputtered, as Stockton collected just five hits in the contest. The Ports were walked seven times in the contest, including back-to-back walks in the ninth. But the Ports left seven on base in the contest, and missed a couple scoring opportunities in the game.

The Ports jumped ahead to a quick 1-0 lead in the bottom of the first, as center fielder Jermaine Mitchell slammed the second pitch he saw to left field for his third home run of the season.

The lead did not last long as Modesto piled on four runs in the top of the second. First baseman Matt Repec led off with a single, and Scott Beerer and Hector Gomez followed with singles. Catcher Lars Davis scored Repec on a fielder's choice play that put out Gomez at second. Shortstop Warren Schaeffer, making his first appearance in the series, hit a sacrifice fly to Mitchell to score Beerer. Left fielder Michael Mitchell collected the fourth hit of the inning, to put runners on first and second for center fielder Charlie Blackmon. Blackmon slammed a double to left field to score both runners and make it 4-1. Maikol Gonzalez struck out to end the inning.

After the second inning, the Ports have scattered just three hits and a walk to Modesto batters.

The Ports cut the lead in half in the fourth frame when right fielder Grant Desme collected his 17<sup>th</sup> home run in a Ports uniform. Desme's homer dropped behind the Food 4 Less sign in left center field.

Stockton made it 4-3 in the seventh frame. With two out, Modesto starter Kenneth Durst issued back-to-back walks. Mitchell then collected his second RBI of the game with a single to score designated hitter Kala Ka'aihue. The Nuts then called on Austin Chambliss to face left fielder Shane Keough. Keough walked to load the bases. First baseman Daric Barton, who is with the Ports on a major league rehab assignment, then popped out to Schaeffer to end the frame and strand three runners.

Ports reliever Mickey Storey was outstanding in relief, striking out the side in the eighth, and fanning two more in the ninth. He allowed just one hit in 2.0 innings.

In the bottom of the ninth, Nuts reliever Craig Baker walked Frank Martinez and Kala Ka'aihue back-to-back. With two on and no out, shortstop Dusty Coleman stepped up to the plate. While Coleman was at bat, Martinez was picked off at second base. It was a crucial out for the Ports, since it removed a runner from scoring position. Coleman struck out and Mitchell grounded out to end the game, giving Modesto the series victory.

The Ports will next host San Jose for the weekend. LHP Anthony Capra (2-0, 2.17) will start for Stockton, while LHP Clayton Tanner (9-6, 3.21) will toe the rubber for San Jose on Friday night at 7:05 p.m. The game will be telecast on Comcast Hometown Network, which is Channel 104 for Comcast customers.

## **Cougars Drop Opener in Beloit**

Kane County's struggles continue in loss to Snappers

**BELOIT, Wisc.** – After enjoying their first off day in nearly a month Wednesday, the Kane County Cougars returned to action Thursday night but suffered a 5-1 loss against the Beloit Snappers at Pohlman Field. The Cougars scored in the first inning for a quick lead but never scored again. They have dropped five of their last six games and are a season-worst five games under .500 at 24-29 in the 2nd half.

The Cougars, who had not scored first in their last 10 games, got an RBI single from Tyler Ladendorf in the top of the opening frame to score Nino Leyja for a 1-0 advantage. But starter Shawn Haviland gave up a solo homer in the bottom half and allowed three more runs -- one earned -- in the third for a 4-1 deficit. A.J. Huttenlocker yielded a run in the seventh to make it 5-1, and that became the final.

Haviland (6-10), who fell to 0-7 in his last 10 starts, gave up four runs -- two earned -- on six hits over 4 2/3 innings. Trey Barham posted 1 1/3 scoreless innings and Huttenlocker gave up one run in two frames. Offensively the Cougars went 1-2-3 just once but stranded 11 men on base. They are hitting .164 with runners in scoring position in their last six games.

The Cougars (24-29, 65-58) and Snappers (21-32, 49-74) continue the four-game set Friday night at 7 CT. Murphy Smith (0-2, 4.38) will face Daniel Osterbrock (6-9, 5.68).