

A's News Clips, Thursday, August 27, 2009

A's swept under by Mariners

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's get three more cracks at the Seattle Mariners at Safeco Field in their next-to-last series of the season.

They'll be looking to erase some bad memories.

Their time spent in the Emerald City has amounted to heartache and frustration in 2009, as the Mariners capped off a three-game sweep with a 5-3 victory before 18,695 fans Wednesday night.

That leaves Oakland 3-9 this season against Seattle, the team it needs to catch to climb out of the American League West cellar.

"It's a frustrating series," A's manager Bob Geren said. "When we needed a big hit, we didn't get it. When we hit it hard, it was right at somebody, and when we needed a play in the field, we didn't get it."

The A's are 1-5 at Safeco, and those defeats haven't been of the garden variety. Their five losses in Seattle have come by a combined eight runs.

The first trip to Seattle in May included a 15-inning defeat in which the A's let two leads slip away late.

They lost on Ryan Langerhans' walk-off homer in the 10th inning Tuesday.

Wednesday's series finale included what looked like a possible game-tying homer by Jack Cust that instant replay upheld as a foul ball.

"It was a disappointing series," Cust said. "We were in the games but didn't come through."

Cust pulled the A's to within 3-1 in the fourth with a shot to right off Luke French (4-3), giving Cust his third 20-homer campaign in three seasons with the A's.

After Seattle made it 4-1 in the fifth, Kurt Suzuki drilled a two-run homer in the sixth to trim the deficit to 4-3.

Two batters later, the A's thought perhaps they had tied it. Cust hit a moon shot off the top window of a restaurant, which is located well above the first deck in right field. Geren went out to protest after first-base umpire Mike Winters ruled it foul, and the call went to instant replay.

When the umpires returned to the field, Winters, the crew chief, signaled foul ball.

Cust wound up striking out.

"You don't see too many homers in the major leagues that go completely over the foul pole," Geren said. "It's hard to hit one that high and that hard, and it's tough to call."

Gio Gonzalez (4-5) lost his third straight decision, going five innings and giving up four runs and seven hits. He was touched for a two-run homer in the first by Jose Lopez, a 2-0 fastball low in the zone that Lopez went down and got.

Geren talked before the game about the athleticism of his current starting outfield of Scott Hairston, Rajai Davis and Ryan Sweeney, but Davis had a night to forget in center field, mishandling two fly balls on difficult but makable plays.

In the first, Mike Sweeney's fly ball to the warning track deflected off Davis' glove but was scored a double. Davis' seventh-inning miscue was more costly. He had a bead on Lopez's fly, only to have it pop out of his mitt for a two-base error. Mike Sweeney followed with an RBI single that padded the Mariners' lead to 5-3.

"I guess it was one of those days," Davis said. "I had 'em both. Normally I catch them. This wasn't a normal day."

A's notebook: Rehabbing Chavez sets sights on return in 2010

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Rehabbing Chavez sets sights on a return in 2010

SEATTLE — Eric Chavez recently began rehabilitating his back after having his second microdiscectomy surgery June 23.

And he still has his sights set on returning to third base for the A's in 2010.

But the six-time AL Gold Glove winner said Wednesday that if his back won't let him play defense, transitioning into a DH-type role might be his best bet for extending his career.

"I've never hurt my back swinging or rotating, it's always been bending down (fielding grounders) or whatever," said Chavez, who's been getting treatment from a Seattle-based doctor for the past two weeks. "If it doesn't work playing third, I'll try to hit, try to extend my career a couple years doing that."

Chavez was in good spirits chatting with reporters during batting practice at Safeco Field. His wife, Alex, gave birth to their third child — a boy, Cruz — three weeks ago.

He was pleased to hear Brett Wallace, who might be Oakland's future third baseman, is knocking the cover off the ball for Triple-A Sacramento.

As for his future, Chavez is realistic about a return to full health. His right shoulder, which has been operated on twice, still "feels like garbage" sometimes. His back began acting up while he sat for a few innings watching Monday's game. But Chavez said he'll take advantage of the eight-month recovery time he has until spring training in February.

"I'm going to take care of everything, get in great shape, roll the dice and see what happens," he said.

≈ Tonight's A's-Los Angeles Angels game is a makeup of the April 9 game postponed because of the death of Angels pitcher Nick Adenhardt and two others.

Adenhardt pitched against the A's on April 8 before being involved in a fatal car accident early the next morning.

It's the A's first visit to Angel Stadium since the tragedy.

A's catcher Kurt Suzuki has done extensive fundraising to support Jon Wilhite, a former college teammate who survived the crash.

The Angels will honor the crash victims before Saturday's game, with Wilhite throwing out the first pitch. Suzuki said his parents are flying in from Maui, Hawaii, in part to spend time with Wilhite's parents.

≈ First baseman Chris Carter, the A's top power-hitting prospect, was promoted to Sacramento after hitting .337 with 24 homers and 101 RBI with Double-A Midland. He went 3-for-5 with four RBI against Fresno in his Triple-A debut Wednesday. It's doubtful Carter will get a September call-up since he's not on the 40-man roster. "... Left-hander Dallas Braden visited a neurologist and found that a nerve in his left foot is "traumatized," as manager Bob Geren described it. The diagnosis makes it even more likely that Braden's season could be done.

Seattle sweeps by punchless Oakland

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Runs were at a premium for Oakland in this three-game series at Safeco Field, so when Jack Cust hit a mammoth shot toward the top of the pole in right in the sixth, A's manager Bob Geren contested the foul call.

After a video review, the umpires upheld the ruling; the ball just missed to the wrong side. Fair, it would have tied the game. Instead, Oakland fell 5-3, unable to prevent a sweep by the Mariners.

"It was kind of a disappointing series here," Cust said. "We were in the games, but we couldn't come through."

The A's scored six runs in the series, and Seattle's bullpen worked 10 scoreless innings. On Wednesday, Oakland went 0-for-8 with men in scoring position, and with two on and no outs in the ninth, Tommy Everidge and Nomar Garciaparra both struck out looking on borderline pitches. Adam Kennedy grounded out to end the game.

"A lot of guys weren't happy with the calls," said Geren, who couldn't tell whether pitches were inside or outside from his vantage point.

Earlier in the sixth, Kurt Suzuki cut the A's deficit to one by crunching a two-run homer into the Oakland bullpen. He went deep on an 0-2 pitch from Luke French, the first time all season an A's player has hit an 0-2 pitch out of the park.

Cust hit a solo homer in the fourth. He began using a toe-tap at the start of his swing a week ago during the middle of an at-bat against the Yankees, and his next time at bat, Cust hit a first-pitch homer against New York's Chad Gaudin, snapping a 26-game homerless streak. The toe-tap stuck, and he's 12-for-23 since then.

"I'd done it in the minors, and it was just to switch things up," Cust said. "That was attempt 101-C."

A's starter Gio Gonzalez gave up four runs in five innings, including two on a homer by Jose Lopez in the first.

"It was a good down-and-away pitch, but this is the big leagues," Gonzalez said. "Some pop it up, some go yard. He got the other one."

Rajai Davis had a rough night in center field. He missed a long flyball by Mike Sweeney at the warning track in left-center in the first, though he was in position. In the seventh, Davis again made a long run, got to the right spot, but failed to catch a flyball by Lopez.

"I had them both," said Davis, who has a small fracture in his right (non-glove) thumb. "Normally, I catch 'em. This wasn't a normal game."

Lopez wound up at second on the error, and Sweeney poked a single to left. A good throw from Scott Hairston probably would have gotten Lopez. The ball beat the runner to the plate, but was toward the first-base side, and Suzuki couldn't handle it.

Geren said the team will go to a six-man rotation Tuesday when the rosters expand. Geren said long reliever Edgar Gonzalez might be an option to become a starter; the possibilities at Triple-A Sacramento include Chad Reineke, Clayton Mortensen and Dana Eveland.

Oakland has looked for an experienced starter to add to the rotation, with no success. Boston released Brad Penny on Wednesday, but it's assumed that he'd like to sign with a contender.

Braden's nerve inflamed

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Left-hander **Dallas Braden** visited a neurologist who told him he has a "traumatized" nerve in his left foot, according to manager **Bob Geren**.

Geren still hopes to get Braden back on the mound for Oakland this season, even if it's for a start or two or in relief, but Geren admitted that "the clock is ticking." Braden's last start was July 31, and he has not done any throwing the past week or so because of the inflamed nerve. He would need at least three weeks to get ready to start, and there are just more than five weeks to play.

Braden had a rash on his foot all season, an allergic reaction to the neoprene toe guard he was wearing, and a bump developed on the top of his foot near the ankle. It wasn't clear what it was initially, so Braden had to have a biopsy; the infection then caused so much swelling that he had to have the foot lanced and drained several times. Geren said that Braden received treatment throughout the season.

Chavez visits: **Eric Chavez** said Wednesday in Seattle that his plan still is to come back as a third baseman next spring as he rehabs from his second back surgery in less than two years. He nixed the idea of playing first; if he can't play third, the issue would be bending over for grounders. He'd have to DH otherwise.

"I'll get in great shape, roll the dice and see what happens," he said.

Chavez, 31, joked that he felt old when he heard that he was minor-league third baseman **Brett Wallace's** favorite player; Chavez is looking forward to working with Wallace next spring.

Carter's fine debut: **Chris Carter** went 3-for-5 and drove in four runs in his debut with Triple-A Sacramento as the River Cats routed Fresno 11-3. Carter had 101 RBIs for Double-A Midland.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle, 8/27/09

No Ichiro: Manager Bob Geren was asked how different it is to play Seattle without Ichiro Suzuki, out with a sore calf. "We're 0-2, so it's hard to say," Geren answered. "You'd think it would work to your advantage, but we have to win to avoid a sweep."

Cust oh so close, but A's drop finale

Slugger just misses late homer; Gonzalez loses third straight

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

SEATTLE -- Whatever momentum the A's built up while taking two out of three from the playoff-contending Tigers over the weekend at home disappeared this week in the Pacific Northwest.

Facing the lowest-scoring team in the American League, Oakland went back to its own low-scoring ways, crossing the plate all of six times in three games.

The Mariners picked on rookie left-hander Gio Gonzalez early and often Wednesday on the way to a 5-3 victory in the finale of a three-game series at Safeco Field.

"It was a frustrating series, very much so, for a lot of reasons," A's manager Bob Geren admitted. "It's frustrating to lose three games when we should have, or could have, won all three."

Oakland's bats were silent in a 3-1 loss Monday; a crucial late error wasted a fine outing by Brett Anderson in the way to a 4-2 loss in 10 innings Tuesday; there was more shoddy defense and more offensive opportunities squandered in the finale.

Oakland designated hitter Jack Cust, who hit his 20th homer and missed by inches what would have been his 21st -- and a game-tying solo shot -- on a video review, summed it all up nicely.

"Kind of a disappointing series," he offered.

Center fielder Rajai Davis was the main defensive culprit on Wednesday. He was unable to catch what he conceded was a ball he could have caught off the bat of former A's DH Mike Sweeney in the first inning, and while that miscue didn't cost the Oakland a run, his two-base error in the seventh inning led to an unearned insurance run.

Jose Lopez' deep fly into the left-center gap bounced off the heel of his glove in the seventh, and Sweeney drove in Lopez by muscling a snapped-bat single into left.

"I had a humbling experience," Davis said. "I just messed up. ... I had 'em both. Normally I catch 'em. This wasn't a normal day."

The A's made Seattle sweat it out a little when Mark Ellis and Ryan Sweeney slapped consecutive singles to start the top of the ninth, but Mariners closer David Aardsma steadied himself to catch Tommy Everidge and pinch-hitter Nomar Garciaparra looking before getting Adam Kennedy to bounce out to end the game.

"Both teams put on a good show," said Gonzalez, who allowed four runs on seven hits and three walks in five uneven innings. "All three games were close games."

Gonzalez, who entered the game with a 3.06 ERA in his past six starts, was in trouble right away, issuing a one-out walk to former A's infielder Jack Hannahan in front of a home run by Lopez in the bottom of the first inning.

"It was a good down-and-away pitch, but like [A's catcher Kurt Suzuki] said, this is the big leagues," Gonzalez said. "Some pop it up, some go yard."

The Mariners made it 3-0 an inning later, though, when Hannahan led off with a double and scored on a single by Bill Hall.

Cust's fourth home run in seven games, a solo shot off Seattle starter Luke French, closed the gap in the fourth, but the hosts got that run back in the fifth when Hannahan walked, moved to third on a double by Lopez and scored on a sacrifice fly by Hall.

Hannahan, traded from Oakland to Seattle for a Minor League pitcher in July, also turned in the defensive play of the game, ranging over to the camera well near the A's dugout in the second inning to make a leaning, stumbling catch on a popup by Scott Hairston.

"Hannahan has done such a phenomenal job for us," said Seattle skipper Don Wakamatsu, Oakland's bench coach last season. "Both defensively and offensively."

Suzuki homered to left after Davis' single in the sixth, and Cust skied what he thought was a game-tying homer over the foul pole in right minutes later. But after the umpires huddled and eventually reviewed the play on tape, the original on-field foul call was upheld.

"I thought when I hit it, it was out," Cust said. "It's a hard call. I assume they might have had a couple more angles than I saw on [tape after the game]."

Added Geren: "I knew it was gonna be extremely close. ... They did the right thing. I like that opportunity for them to see it and get it right. I think it's good for the game."

Toe tap has put Cust on a tear of late

Oakland (55-71) at Los Angeles (75-50), 7:25 p.m. PT

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

SEATTLE -- Never again will Jack Cust say never.

That's essentially the lesson he's learned over the past week, his best week of the season. It followed one of the worst slumps of his career, and he turned it all around by going back to something he's previously sworn off forever.

It's a simple tap of his right toes, serving as something of a timing mechanism -- a trigger for the "load" phase of his powerful, uppercut swing as the pitcher readies to deliver.

"I had said I was never going to use it again," said Cust. "I'd said, a while back, that from now on, I'm just going to stick with the same swing no matter what -- never change what's helped me get to where I am again."

Where Cust found himself last Wednesday, however, was in the throes of a 12-for-71 (.169) slump with zero homers since July 24, the day Matt Holliday was traded.

"So I figured, 'What do I have to lose?'" Cust said. "It wasn't going to be worse than what I was already doing."

It was better. A lot better. Cust went back to the tap that night against Yankees starter -- and former A's teammate -- Chad Gaudin and immediately discovered that he was seeing the ball better; he walked in his first two at-bats.

In his third at-bat, against Alfredo Aceves, he drove a fastball the other way for a drought-ending homer to left-center field. But it was his next at-bat, against left-hander Phil Hughes, which proved the real eye-opener.

"The homer was on a heater, and I did what I should do with it when I'm seeing the ball well," Cust said. "But Hughes threw me a pretty good breaking ball, and I stayed on it and hit a single to right."

That night started an 11-for-19 (.579), six-game tear that included a two-homer game Sunday and four games with at least two hits. He hit his fourth homer in seven games Wednesday at Seattle, so he's heading into Thursday's opener of a four-game series in Anaheim on quite a roll.

"I feel like myself again, so I'm sticking with [the toe-tap]," Cust said.

He then smiled and added, "But if it stops working, I'll go back to stuff I did in Little League if I have to."

Pitching matchup

OAK: RHP Trevor Cahill (6-12, 4.86 ERA)

In his last start, against the visiting Tigers, Cahill gave his team seven solid innings yet extended his winless streak to six games, picking up his eighth no-decision of the season. He surrendered two runs on five hits and three walks while fanning four in seven innings before the A's went on to win with a run in the ninth, 3-2. Cahill's effort marked just the eighth time in 26 career starts he's pitched at least seven innings. The A's rookie is 0-0 with a 4.66 ERA in two starts against the Angels this season.

LAA: RHP Ervin Santana (7-6, 6.13 ERA)




Shaking off early command issues, Santana maintained his recent roll, winning his fourth consecutive start by holding the Jays to three earned runs across six innings on Saturday in Toronto. He yielded seven hits and four walks, striking out three, but was able to get big outs when he needed them, getting assistance from a spectacular defense. Santana's ERA over his past four outings is 3.33, inspiring confidence that he's recapturing his '08 All-Star form. Santana has dominated the A's, going 10-1 in 15 career appearances with a 1.35 ERA across 100 1/3 innings, allowing only 68 hits.

Dribblers ...

Infielder Bobby Crosby (left calf) is eligible to come off the disabled list on Sept. 2 and has been hitting and doing drills pain-free for a few days. A's manager Bob Geren said Crosby will be allowed to play in a Minor League game or two if he's ready to play before he's eligible to come off the DL. ... Triple-A Sacramento outfielder Travis Buck homered on

Tuesday night. ... First baseman Chris Carter was transferred from Double-A Midland on Tuesday, and he went out in style, going 3-for-5 with his 24th homer and 101st RBI. Triple-A Sacramento, here he comes. Just in time for the playoffs. ... When Mark Ellis starts Thursday's game against the Angels, he'll move into fourth place on the franchise's all-time list for games played at second base.

Up next

- Friday: Athletics (Brett Tomko, 3-2, 3.69) at Angels (Trevor Bell, 1-1, 9.49), 7:05 p.m. PT 
- Saturday: Athletics (Vin Mazzaro, 4-9, 5.32) at Angels (Jered Weaver, 13-5, 4.03), 6:05 p.m. PT 
- Sunday: Athletics (Brett Anderson, 7-9, 4.35) at Angels (John Lackey, 8-7, 4.16), 12:35 p.m. PT 

Chavez hopes to be back next spring

Slugger rehabbing with highly regarded therapist in Seattle

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

SEATTLE -- Three days into his temporary reunion with teammates, A's third baseman Eric Chavez on Wednesday addressed a variety of topics while chatting with reporters before the finale of a three-game series against the host Mariners at Safeco Field.

Topping the list, of course, was his rehab from a second back surgery since October 2007. Chavez underwent a season-ending microdiscectomy on June 23, and the hope is that he'll be ready to play at some point during Spring Training 2010.

"I'm good," said Chavez, "I started rehab about 2 1/2 [weeks] ago. It's slow."

The longest-tenured player in the A's organization, Chavez spent part of Monday's game in uniform in the Oakland dugout but decided against suiting up Tuesday and Wednesday.

"After sitting on the bench for a couple innings, it was like, [that's enough]," Chavez said.

Chavez, 31, made his big league debut in 1998 and won six consecutive Gold Gloves (2001-06) before injuries and subsequent surgeries on his left and right shoulders and back caused him to miss nearly half of the '07 season and most of the '08 and '09 campaigns.

"I've been rehabbing for a long time," he said with a measure of resignation.

He's been rehabbing in Seattle for the past two weeks, having found a highly regarded therapist in advance of a planned family trip to the Pacific Northwest. Chavez's wife, Alex, gave birth to the couple's third child, Cruz, about three weeks ago.

"Everyone's doing great," Chavez said. "Everyone's healthy."

Well, maybe not *everybody*. Chavez himself is a long way from being able to do the one thing that's caused his back the most problems: bending over to field ground balls.

"Last year I had a lot of optimism," said Chavez, who missed the first two months of the 2008 season while recovering from the first back surgery. "This year I'm a little more realistic. The best thing is I have the eight-month recovery [period]."

Though he admitted to still having days when his surgically repaired right shoulder feels like "garbage," Chavez still plans to return to the hot corner. Playing first base, he noted, wouldn't make playing defense much easier because it still involves bending over.

"Right now I'm trying to come back as a third baseman," he said. "So we'll see. If that doesn't work out, maybe I can DH and try to extend my career a few years and just hit."

Chavez said he's spoken quite a bit with former A's teammate Mark Kotsay, who also has had a pair of microdiscectomies and has made a full recovery. That Kotsay, 33, is still in the big leagues is encouraging.

"It helps," Chavez said. "But it's hard to compare two different people."

Planning to stay in Seattle for another week before heading back home to the Phoenix area, Chavez said he's been closely following the fortunes of the A's and likes what he's seen lately.

"It's fun to watch," he said. "Before it was kind of dormant. Now we're stealing bases and making things happen. The young pitching's been good, too. ... I think we're on the right track."

Chavez, who is making \$11 million this season, is under contract for 2010 at \$12 million, with a \$12.5 million club option for 2011 that can be bought out for a reported \$3 million.

One of Oakland's top prospects, Brett Wallace, is a third baseman from Northern California who grew up idolizing Chavez.

"That's when you know you're old," said Chavez, who vowed to help Wallace any way he can.

Braden may not pitch again this season

Lefty has infection in ankle; A's to go with six-man rotation

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

SEATTLE -- A day after saying left-hander Dallas Braden might join the A's this weekend in Anaheim, Oakland manager Bob Geren reversed course.

Braden, on the disabled list since Aug. 1 with an infection near his left ankle, will not be in Anaheim, and it's possible that he won't pitch again this season.

"Dallas saw a neurologist today," Geren said Wednesday before the finale of a three-game series against the host Mariners at Safeco Field. "The nerves in there have been traumatized ... we don't really have any kind of timetable [for his return]."

Braden, Oakland's Opening Night starter, is 8-9 with a 3.89 ERA in 22 starts. He had been playing catch recently but is now shut down entirely, and he'll likely need to be on a bullpen mound within a week or so to have any hope of working his way back.

Geren said he'd like to bring Braden back for a start or two, but he's open to the idea of Braden working out of the bullpen if he can't build up enough stamina to start before the end of the season.

Regardless, Geren said he definitely plans to go with a six-man rotation "on or around Sept. 1."

Currently, the rotation consists of rookies Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson, Vin Mazzaro and Gio Gonzalez and veteran Brett Tomko.

Geren mentioned long reliever Edgar Gonzalez as a candidate for the sixth spot, but he also noted that he'd have no problem plucking a starter from Triple-A Sacramento. The River Cats are on the verge of clinching the Pacific Coast League's Pacific Southern Division and will open their playoff run Sept. 9.

"If we need someone," Geren said, "our history is we'll go get someone."

A's get swept by Mariners

Associated Press

SEATTLE -- Jose Lopez homered, newly acquired Bill Hall drove in two runs, and Luke French won his third game in four decisions as a Mariner in Seattle's 5-3 victory over the A's on Wednesday night.

Relievers Miguel Batista, Mark Lowe and David Aardsma kept Oakland scoreless over the final 4 1-3 innings.

The Mariners missed All-Star leadoff man Ichiro Suzuki for the entire series because of a sore calf. Yet the American League's lowest-scoring team swept three games from the team ranked last in the league in slugging percentage, extra-base hits and home runs entering Wednesday.

It was Seattle's first series sweep since June 19-21 against Arizona.

Aardsma allowed a ground-ball single to Mark Ellis and a bloop hit to Ryan Sweeney to begin the ninth. He struck out Tommy Everidge looking at a 96-mph fastball almost down the middle. Pinch hitter Nomar Garciaparra then looked at another 96-mph pitch on the inside corner for strike three, with the veteran protesting to umpire Dan Bellino it was off the plate.

Adam Kennedy grounded out to conclude Aardsma's 30th save in 34 chances, as the Mariners stayed on the fringes of the wild-card race, 7 1-2 games behind front-running Boston.

Lopez's 19th home run of the season was a two-run shot in the first off Gio Gonzalez.

Hall singled under Gonzalez's glove in the third to score Jack Hannahan after the former Athletic had doubled. In the fifth, Gonzalez (4-5) walked Hannahan and Lopez doubled him to third. Hall made it 4-1 with a sacrifice fly.

Hall's other two-RBI game with Seattle was Friday at Cleveland, his first game after a trade from Milwaukee.

French (4-3), making his fifth start since Seattle acquired him from Detroit in the Jarrod Washburn trade, allowed Oakland back into it in the sixth. Rajai Davis singled leading off, then Kurt Suzuki hit an 0-2 changeup for his 11th home run.

One out later, Jack Cust hit a drive down the right-field line and off a seldom-reached, top window of a restaurant. First-base umpire Mike Winters ruled it foul. A's manager Bob Geren came out and asked Winters, the crew chief, "That went over the pole, didn't it?"

After a couple of minutes' delay for a review, Winters emerged with his crew and again signaled foul ball instead of a tying home run. Cust struck out, Ellis walked and French left. The 23-year-old left-hander allowed six hits and three runs in 5 2-3 innings.

Seattle's insurance run came in the seventh. Center fielder Davis, who had a deep fly ball by Mike Sweeney go off his glove for a generously scored double following Lopez's homer in the first, dropped another deep fly by Lopez for a two-base error. Sweeney followed with a broken-bat single, and Seattle led 5-3.

The unearned run was only the second off reliever Jeff Gray in 11 appearances this season.

Oakland scored in the fourth when Cust hit another towering drive to right, this one plenty fair for his 20th home run. It's his third consecutive season with at least 20 homers. He had five home runs in 169 plate appearances for four other teams dating to 2001, before San Diego traded him to the A's for cash in May 2007.

Whatever Happened to Nomar?

On Oakland's Bench, Far From Boston's Drama, an Introvert Finds Contentment

By JASON TURBOW, Wall Street Journal, 8/26/09

It's 2½ hours before game time at the Oakland Coliseum, and Nomar Garciaparra sits at his locker, his eyes on a crossword puzzle in his lap.

In a decidedly young clubhouse, A's players flit about, passing time the way young men do—loudly, lightheartedly and not without raunch.

By and large, though, these players are more than a decade younger than Mr. Garciaparra. Several weren't yet 10 when he made his major-league debut. And to watch him among them—the 1997 American League Rookie of the Year, a six-time All-Star once considered the best right-handed hitter since Joe DiMaggio, the husband of soccer icon Mia Hamm and father to twin girls—he looks a bit out of place.

It's been a broken-down season in a string of broken-down seasons for Mr. Garciaparra, 36, who's struggled to find at-bats even with the last-place A's. He's three years removed from his last truly productive campaign and three teams past his heyday with the Red Sox. He's also geographically separated from his family, which, outside of regular visits to the Bay Area, remains in Los Angeles. Watching him now, a guy who has earned more than \$75 million over his career, begs the question: What's keeping him here?

Mr. Garciaparra feels like he still has something to give. "I know that it could end tomorrow," he said in a recent interview. "I don't take it for granted."

But the fact remains that what should have been the defining accomplishment of his career—Boston's now-mythical 2004 World Series championship—was achieved without him. He was traded in the middle of the season. The 5½ seasons he's spent outside New England haven't produced another title. And with every new revelation about players taking steroids, the era in which he played his best baseball is clouded.

On the surface, this seems like a recipe for bitterness. One might expect to find Nomar Garciaparra in a raging boil, cursing the fates. But out here in Oakland he is doing no such thing. For the first time in his baseball career, he's unconditionally happy.

Mr. Garciaparra came up in the pressure cooker of Boston, a culture driven by an unruly throng of reporters and an eight-decade championship drought. "It was," said Darren Lewis, who played in Boston from 1998-2001, "the most intense atmosphere in sport."

For Mr. Garciaparra, a man of strict routines, it was an awkward fit. Ex-teammates Mr. Lewis and Mike Benjamin went so far as to use the word "introverted" when describing Mr. Garciaparra, though each wrapped it in a compliment. "He did his own thing," said Mr. Benjamin. "He didn't try to put on this image that wasn't him." Mr. Lewis described being impressed by the shortstop's "intellect" and "humbleness." Mo Vaughn, Boston's first baseman for Mr. Garciaparra's first three years with the team, says the introvert description is accurate, "but there's nothing wrong with that. I sometimes wish I could have shut up and just gone about doing my job, like he did."

Early on, this detachment didn't matter—Mr. Vaughn was the team's superstar mouthpiece. But when Mr. Vaughn left for the Angels in 1999, Mr. Garciaparra inherited the title without any say in the matter. "Mo would be at his locker for 45 minutes before the game talking to the media, and then again for 45 minutes after the game," he says. "That wasn't me. I wasn't going to do that."

During this period, Mr. Garciaparra told Boston Globe writer Dan Shaughnessy, "I play three games every night. There's the media before the game, then there's the game, which is fun, then there's the media after the game." The media part, says Mr. Shaughnessy, "was like he was getting a flu shot all the time. He just kind of hated it."

When left alone, Mr. Garciaparra followed a set of baseball routines that ran, he says, "from the minute I woke up to the minute I got home." Stretching, running and lifting—even signing autographs—all occurred strictly by the clock. The

items in his locker were precisely arranged, and at the plate, he strapped and re-strapped his batting gloves before every pitch. "There's a difference between being obsessive-compulsive and being highly routine-oriented," he says. "Obsessive-compulsive is all the time. I don't do this all the time. In the season, it's my way of focusing on the game at hand."

In 2003, Mr. Garciaparra was offered a four-year, \$60 million contract to stay with the Sox. It was a lot of money, but less than one-third the amount being given to fellow shortstops Alex Rodriguez and Derek Jeter. He turned it down. When he missed the first two months of the 2004 season with a heel injury, he was almost openly at odds with the front office. In July 2004, general manager Theo Epstein traded him to the Chicago Cubs. Boston went 42-19 the rest of the season and swept the St. Louis Cardinals to win its first championship since 1918. Mr. Garciaparra was awarded a World Series ring in absentia.

If this was a cold comfort for the shortstop, it has since grown colder. In July, a report surfaced that his former teammates on that 2004 Boston team, Manny Ramirez and David Ortiz, both failed an anonymous 2003 drug test that had been administered for survey purposes. Mr. Ortiz denied knowingly using steroids and Mr. Ramirez could not be reached for comment.

Mr. Garciaparra has never failed a drug test or been the subject of any credible allegation about steroids. He says he's never taken anything stronger than creatine. But his peak years, from 1998 to 2003, have become known in baseball as a time of rampant cheating. Everything from the home-run heroics of Barry Bonds to the MVP performances of Alex Rodriguez and Jason Giambi have come under suspicion. In this company, even Mr. Garciaparra's .313 career batting average loses its glow.

But since he left Boston, Mr. Garciaparra's mood has consistently lifted. Two months after joining the Los Angeles Dodgers in 2006, he was presented with a sarape and bottle of tequila before a game on Cinco de Mayo. Mr. Garciaparra, whose father Ramon is from Mexico, wasted no time calling his teammates together in the clubhouse for a round of shots—something many of those who knew him in Boston had difficulty picturing. That night he won the game with a walk-off single in the ninth.

This season, he is—for the first time, really—a backup player. Last year Mr. Garciaparra was diagnosed with exertional compartment syndrome in his calves, which leads to easily strained muscles if he doesn't get significant rest. "The guy can still hit like he always could," says Oakland General Manager Billy Beane, "it's just a matter of how much we can keep him on the field."

In Oakland's visit to Boston in July, Mr. Garciaparra approached the plate for the first time as a visiting player. The crowd roared, first for seconds, then minutes. Stunned, Mr. Garciaparra backed away from the plate and did a slow 360, taking time to acknowledge fans in every section of the ballpark. For those watching, it seemed a very real possibility that he might not be able to maintain his composure. "He was about as choked up as you can be on a baseball field," said A's third baseman Adam Kennedy. It was, Mr. Garciaparra said, one of the greatest moments of his career.

Mr. Garciaparra says he won't make any decisions about retirement until after the season. "I want to know when I stop playing that I gave everything I could—every last ounce," he said. "A teammate once told me that the last day he ever played he knew his tank was empty. That was one of the coolest things I ever heard. The ultimate. That's when you know you can go home."

Stone urges Oakland A's move to San Jose: LA Rotarians hear debate over baseball territory

Written by Jana Seshadri - Town Crier Staff Writer 8/26/09

When Santa Clara County Assessor Larry Stone talked to the Rotary Club of Los Altos last Thursday, a reasonable bet would have been that the topic would be housing values. Not so. Stone talked baseball, specifically pitching the logic of the Oakland Athletics moving to San Jose.

A board member of the San Jose Sports Authority since 2006, Stone said that moving to San Jose should prove financially beneficial for the A's, even though it might cost \$400 million to build a new stadium.

Stone served as a counterpoint to San Francisco Giants CEO Bill Neukom, who visited Los Altos Rotarians a month ago insisting that Santa Clara County should remain Giants' territory. But Stone suggested San Jose was the only viable option for the A's to survive in the Bay Area.

Previous talks about the A's moving to Fremont fell through, but more recent discussion centers on the baseball team's move to San Jose.

"There's only one option left for the A's: San Jose," Stone said.

According to Stone, Major League Baseball (MLB) pays \$35 million annually to the Oakland A's, a revenue-sharing

measure because the team is currently designated a low-revenue team.

"When they move to San Jose, they (the A's) can contribute to MLB," Stone said.

San Jose has everything necessary to house a national sports team, according to Stone. San Jose International Airport is well-connected and undergoing massive redevelopment. The Diridon train station is currently the final destination stop for Caltrain and Light Rail and will have BART and high-speed trains in the future. San Jose went through an extensive redevelopment in the 1990s, which expanded the retail, restaurant and hotel business in the downtown area and attracted additional art and cultural events to the city. The HP Pavilion, built with 100 percent public financing, is a regional asset and attracts major events such as concerts, sporting matches and shows. The San Jose Convention Center, which caters to the Silicon Valley professional community, is equipped to hold business conferences and professional meets.

Parking is not a serious problem in San Jose, Stone said, with high-visibility events scheduled all year.

As president of the San Francisco 49ers Stadium Advisory Council since 2007, Stone recounted details of the football team's contract with Santa Clara. The new stadium is estimated to cost \$937 million, \$79 million of which will be an investment by the Santa Clara Redevelopment Agency, he said. A 1,700-car garage near the Santa Clara Convention Center is scheduled for construction.

Stone said he hopes an A's contract with San Jose will soon become reality.

But can the San Francisco Giants prevent the move by asserting their territorial rights on the South Bay? That is a decision for MLB's governing body, Stone said.

According to Stone, MLB should want to approve the A's move to San Jose to eliminate their revenue-sharing payment to the A's and increase the value of sports franchises nationwide.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Sacramento topples Fresno: Cats' magic number at one

rivercats.com

WEST SACRAMENTO, Calif. - River Cats fans hoping to see a playoff celebration Wednesday night will have to wait another day. For those on hand to witness another elite prospect take the Raley Field turf, it was a party like no other.

Chris Carter, a 21-year-old slugger who was vying for MVP honors in Double-A Midland, smashed a three-run double in his Sacramento debut en route to a 11-3 Sacramento victory over the rival Fresno Grizzlies.

The victory moves Sacramento's magic number to one. A Reno loss would have clinched the Pacific Coast League South Division title for Sacramento, but the Aces beat host Las Vegas 6-4. A River Cats victory Thursday (or an Aces loss) will secure the River Cats their eighth division title in 10 years.

Fans in attendance at Raley Field on the day Sacramento clinches its playoff berth will receive half-priced tickets for the 2009 playoffs. Ticket stubs from the clinching game can be redeemed at the Raley Field Ticket Office for half-price playoff tickets to any game(s) during the 2009 postseason, subject to availability.

Carter, who was batting .337 with 24 homers and 101 RBIs with Midland, finished the night 3-for-5 with four RBIs. The 6-foot-4, 210-pounder is listed as the A's sixth overall prospect by Baseball America.

Matt Carson hit his third homer in two games to give Sacramento a 1-0 first-inning lead. It was the center fielder's team-high 22nd homer of the season; he finished the game 4-for-4 with four runs scored. Carter roped a three-run double down the left-field line to put the River Cats up 4-0 in the third. He later added two singles, one of which drove in a run.

It was enough run support for starter Chad Reineke (8-4, 4.49), who allowed three runs over 5.0 innings to improve to 7-1 over his last 10 outings. The right-hander allowed six hits, struck out four and walked four. Sacramento relievers Scott Patterson (2.0 innings), Sam Demel (1.0 inning) and Jerry Blevins (1.0 inning) combined to allow only one hit and one walk over 4.0 innings.

Top San Francisco Giants prospect Buster Posey went 1-for-4, as the Grizzlies looked sloppy (three errors) and flat (seven hits) a day after getting eliminated from playoff contention.

Oakland A's MLN: Carter Heading West

Melissa Lockard
OaklandClubhouse.com

Aug 26, 2009

Texas League pitchers can sleep easier tonight. The nightmare of facing Chris Carter has been passed on to Triple-A hurlers. The Oakland A's promoted the first baseman after Tuesday night's Midland win. He leaves Midland with some impressive numbers.

Carter Promoted To Sacramento

It began as a typical evening for Chris Carter and the Midland Rockhounds. Another win for the Rockhounds and another dominating performance from their big slugger, who went 3-5 with two runs scored, a double, a homer, a walk and three RBIs. The evening ended with a twist, however, as Carter was informed after the game that he was being promoted to Triple-A Sacramento.

Carter leaves a big hole in the Midland line-up, which is currently the best in the Texas League. In 125 games for Midland this season, Carter has hit a remarkable .337 with 41 doubles, 24 homers, 165 hits, 101 RBIs, 82 walks and 13 stolen bases.

Carter leaves the Texas League as the favorite to take home the league's Player of the Year honors. He currently ranks second in batting average, first in OPS (1011, nearly 100 points higher than the second-best total), first in slugging percentage (.576), walks (82) and runs scored (108), tied for first in homers and hits and tied for second in RBIs.

Midland will have to try to make their way into the playoffs without their best hitter. They currently hold a three-game lead in the South division with 13 games to play. Sacramento, on the other hand, saw its magic number dip to two on Tuesday night and can clinch the PCL's Pacific South division title as soon as tonight.

Carter has played mostly at first base for Midland this season, although he had been seeing significant time in the outfield in recent weeks. He figures to get time at first, in the outfield and at DH with the River Cats, who are likely to lose some players to promotion to the big leagues on September 1st when big league rosters expand.

Three A's Prospects On Preliminary AFL Rosters

The Arizona Fall League announced their preliminary rosters on Tuesday. The A's are currently sending three prospects to the annual showcase - outfielders Corey Brown and Grant Desme and second baseman Jemile Weeks. Each team is required to send at least six prospects to the AFL, so the A's will be adding players to the roster over the coming weeks.

Brown and Weeks will be heading to the AFL looking to make-up for at-bats lost this season thanks to injuries. Brown has spent the season with Midland, but he has only appeared in 55 games thanks to a knee issue. He is hitting .258 with eight homers, 38 RBIs and an 818 OPS over that stretch. Brown hit 30 homers in 134 games for the A's two full-season A-ball affiliates last season.

Weeks missed the first month-and-a-half of the season dealing with leg injuries related to a hip flexor tear he sustained with Low-A Kane County in 2008. He has split his time this season with High-A Stockton and with Midland and is hitting a combined .280 with eight homers and an 801 OPS in 67 games for the two teams.

Desme missed virtually all of the 2008 season with injuries, but he has been healthy - and productive - in 2009. Playing for Kane County and Stockton, Desme has hit .285 with 30 doubles, six triples, 28 homers, 85 RBIs and 39 stolen bases. He has a 913 OPS for the season.

Brown and Desme were the A's third and fourth selections in the 2007 draft (supplemental first round and second round, respectively), while Weeks was the A's top pick in 2008.

A's Sign Sattler

According to the website of the independent Northern League, the A's have signed right-hander Daniel Sattler to a minor league contract. He is expected to report to the Stockton Ports. Sattler is a former Texas Rangers farmhand and he spent the 2008 season pitching for the Rangers' Low-A and High-A affiliates. The Purdue alum has a 3.51 ERA in 105.1 career minor league innings. He had been pitching with the Kansas City T-Bones of the Northern League.

Mitchinson Done For Season

Stockton right-hander Scott Mitchinson is officially done for the season. The Australian native appeared in only nine games for Stockton this season thanks to arm problems. He recently underwent a blood plasma replacement procedure on his elbow to help with healing. It is a similar procedure to the one that A's prospect Sean Doolittle had on his knee earlier in the season. Mitchinson has struggled with arm problems throughout his career.

Rookie Watch

As the major league season enters its final month, the A's have two candidates for the American League Rookie of the Year award: reliever Andrew Bailey and starter Brett Anderson. Both are likely to be hurt in the voting thanks to the struggles of the A's club, but both are putting up some compelling numbers.

Bailey was the A's All-Star representative this season, so he is already on the radar for most of the voters. He leads all rookies in ERA (1.99) and all rookie relievers in strike-outs (75) and saves (18). Among all AL relievers, Bailey is fifth in ERA, second in strike-outs and ninth in saves.

Anderson ranks 10th among AL rookie starters in ERA with a 4.35 mark, second in starts (24) and innings pitched (140.2), first in strike-outs (117) and seventh in WHIP (1.30). Since the All-Star break, Anderson has ranked third among AL rookies in ERA (3.88), first in K/9 ratio and second in K/BB ratio and third in WHIP

Hounds Lead In The South Trimmed To Two

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

He didn't have the biggest home run of the game, but Jimmy Van Ostrand (a.k.a. The Bambino) did it ... again ... against the RockHounds. Van Ostrand hit a 2-run home run as the Hooks built a 4-1 lead Wednesday night at Whataburger Field in Corpus Christi and would defeat the 'Hounds, 6-5, on a walk-off home run.

The RockHounds rallied back, getting a solo shot from Shane Peterson, opening what would be a game-tying, 3-run rally in the seventh. The Hooks came back to take the lead on a flair double by Wladimir Sutil and a Texas Leaguer to shallow center from Collin DeLome.

The 'Hounds scratched back, tying the game again in the ninth on a rally keyed by Archie Gilbert's leadoff double.

In the last of the ninth, DeLome was the villain again, but this time it wasn't a bloop. The Buna, TX, native sent a Jared Lansford pitch over the wall in left for his 19th home run of the year, this one a walk-off solo shot.

Jonathan Fixler also homered for the Hooks, tying the game at 1-1 in the third. Fixler, a former Indiana University star, has just 15 hits in 80 at bats for Corpus Christi, but seven of his 15 hits are home runs.

Then there's "the Bambino," Van Ostrand. In 109 games this season, he has 15 home runs and 67 RBI. Of those totals ... two-thirds of his home runs (10) and more than half of his RBI (34) have come in 27 games against the RockHounds. Quick, call Peter Gammons and have him break that one down.

Congratulations to Chris Carter on his promotion to the (Triple-A) Sacramento RiverCats. With the RockHounds in 2009, Chris hit .335, with 24 HR & 101 RBI, ranking among the Texas League's top three batters in every offensive category except triples and stolen bases, and leading the league in seven categories. He is (with Corpus Christi's ' Drew Locke and Frisco's Chad Tracy) one of the three top candidates for Texas League Player of the Year.

In his Triple-A debut Wednesday night, Chris went 3-for-5 with a double and four RBI in the Rivercats' 11-3 win over the Fresno Grizzlies (SF Giants' AAA club) at Raley Field in Sacramento, California.

Texas League South

The South is, for all intents and purposes, a two-team race with the RockHounds leading Frisco by two games with 12 to go. Corpus Christi is eight games out and first half champion San Antonio is nine games back. Of the 12 games remaining, the 'Hounds play two at Corpus Christi ... four at home against San Antonio and play home-and-home series against Frisco, each a 3-game set.

Popcorn, Peanuts, Fresh Cut Grass

The RockHounds are on the road this week (at Corpus Christi & Frisco) ... before returning to Citibank Ballpark for a critical, 7-game stay hosting San Antonio and Frisco (September 1-7).

Reminder: RockHounds Monday-Saturday home games in September 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 Whataburger Field in Corpus Christi is 6:50 Thursday & Friday.

Blaze Come From Behind To Defeat Ports 8-5

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. - After taking the first of an important three-game set from the Bakersfield Blaze in thrilling fashion, the Stockton Ports have suffered two straight disappointments at Sam Lynn Ballpark. One night after getting blown out, the Boys of Banner Island took a big early lead but failed to make it stand tall as the Bakersfield Blaze mounted an 8-5 come-from-behind win on Wednesday night. After taking the loss, the Ports now face an elimination number of three with 11 games left to play in the regular season.

Early on, it was Stockton that looked to have the game in their back pocket. The Ports came out with guns blazing in the top of the first. After a leadoff single from Jermaine Mitchell, Shane Keough homered to right-center to give Stockton an early 2-0 lead. Steve Kleen followed with a single to left, and Grant Desme came up next and homered to left to give the Ports a quick 4-0 edge.

Ports starter Anthony Capra got off to an extremely quick start, retiring the first nine batters he faced. In the bottom of the fourth, however, the Blaze made it a ballgame. Matt Lawson became the first Blaze baserunner by working a leadoff walk. David Paisano followed with a single to left, and with two aboard, Joey Butler hit his second three-run homer in his last three at-bats, pulling the Blaze to within a run at 4-3.

In the top of the bottom of the sixth, the Blaze widened their lead and did so in a most frustrating manner to Stockton. With Capra still on the hill, David Paisano singled to right and Butler followed with a double to center to put runners at second and third. Capra was then removed from the game in favor of Derrick Gordon (5-6). Gordon immediately orchestrated a successful pick-off of Butler at second, leaving just Paisano at third with two down. The Blaze, however, would thrive from that point on with two-out production. Mauro Gomez singled to center to score Paisano and tie the game at four. Mike Bianucci would follow with a two-run homer to left to put the Blaze up 6-4.

The tying run was charged to Capra who received a no-decision, going 5.1 innings and allowing four runs on four hits while striking out nine.

Stockton got a run back in the top of the seventh. With Blaze starter Tim Murphy (9-10) still on the hill, the Ports got a leadoff single from Dusty Coleman, then an RBI double from Mitchell to cut the deficit to 6-5. Bakersfield, however, brought in Adalberto Flores after Mitchell's double, who retired the next three batters in order and stranded the possible tying run in scoring position.

Murphy, despite a rough outing, went on to earn the win after going six-plus innings, allowing five runs on 11 hits while striking out four.

Leading 6-5, the Blaze scored runs in both the seventh and the eighth and each coming on a wild pitch with two down. Gordon started the seventh and would leave the game with a runner at third and two out. Leonardo Espinal came into the ballgame and had Lawson in a two-strike count. Espinal, however, would throw a wild pitch, allowing Doug Hogan to score from third and putting the Blaze up 7-5. In the eighth, with a runner at third and two down, Espinal uncorked a wild pitch to Bianucci, allowing Paisano to score and putting the Blaze up 8-5.

One of the two runs scored on those wild pitches would be charged to Gordon, while the other charged to Espinal. Gordon received the loss, allowing three runs on three hits in 1.1 innings pitched. Espinal yielded one run on 1.1 innings of work.

Stockton's offense would be shut out down the stretch by Justin Miller who pitched a scoreless eighth and Evan Reed (SV, 20) who earned his 20th save by striking out the side in the ninth.

After dropping two of three to Bakersfield, the Ports will continue their seven-game road trip by heading to Southern

California to begin a four-game set with the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes. Daniel Haigwood (2-1, 3-13 ERA) will head to the hill for Stockton, opposed by Quakes right-hander Ryan Brasier (5-2, 4.80 ERA). First pitch is set for 7:05 p.m. PDT.

Desme Making Up For Lost Time

Melissa Lockard
OaklandClubhouse.com

Aug 27, 2009

Grant Desme is putting together a season to remember one year after a season he'd rather forget. Desme is now one homerun away from being a 30-40 campaign, one season after missing nearly the entire year with a pair of injuries.

The last two times Grant Desme has put together a full season of playing baseball, he has put up dazzling numbers. It is the season that separates those two standout years that he would like to forget.

In 2007, Desme was named the Big West Conference's Player of the Year when he hit .405 with 15 homers, 53 RBIs and a 1227 OPS for the Cal Poly Mustangs. In 2009, Desme has put up similarly outstanding numbers with Low-A Kane County and High-A Stockton, batting .287 with 29 homers, 87 RBIs and a 919 OPS to go along with 40 stolen bases.

The 2008 season saw Desme post an 1833 OPS. Unfortunately for him and for the Oakland A's, it was an OPS achieved after only two games in the Arizona Rookie League. Desme began the 2008 season at extended spring training, where he was working through the final stages of rehabilitation on his left wrist, which was broken with only six games left to play at the end of his 2007 collegiate season. Although Desme got into a handful of games with the A's short-season affiliate in Vancouver at the tail-end of the 2007 season, his wrist was still bothering him at the start of spring training the next year.

Desme was nearly done with his recovery from the wrist injury in June of last season when he encountered another major hurdle. Two games into a stint with the A's Rookie League team, Desme tore the labrum in his non-throwing (left) shoulder on a swing and missed the remainder of the season. Desme spent the next six months rehabbing the surgically repaired shoulder. Being without baseball for that extended period of time was trying for the A's 2007 second-round pick.

"It was pretty frustrating, especially at first because I have never really been hurt before. It was an adjustment to get used to not being able to play," Desme said.

The 2009 season represented a clean slate for Desme, who finished spring training healthy and a part of the Kane County Opening Day roster. The rust from missing virtually an entire season was evident with Desme early on. He went 0-for-his-first-20 with seven strike-outs before breaking through with a four-hit night on the season's seventh day. After that, he found his rhythm and quickly became one of the Midwest League's more dangerous hitters. He posted a 732 OPS in April, but that climbed to 822 in May and 906 in June.

"It definitely took me a little while to get my feet wet and to get used to playing baseball again. I was pretty bad to start off the first month. It took me awhile to get comfortable with playing on an everyday basis," Desme said.

Desme spent exactly half of the season with the Cougars, earning a promotion to Stockton during the Midwest League All-Star break. He hit .274 with 11 homers and an 825 OPS for Kane County and left the Cougars with the highest OPS on the team. Desme also left the Cougars with a perfect 24-for-24 statline in the stolen bases category, a stat that came as a surprise even to him. Desme has continued to rack up the stolen bases with the Ports, as he is 16-for-21 in the California League. His 40 stolen bases put him second in the A's organization behind Sacramento speedster Eric Patterson and his River Cats' team-record 43 steals.

Although Desme has always been a good runner, especially for a man of his size (6'2", 205), he has never been a prolific base stealer until this season. His career-high in college was 12. However, Desme found success stealing bags early in the season, and since then, the outfielder has had the green light to go.

The A's didn't draft Desme with their fourth-overall pick in 2007 for his stolen bases. They took him because of his ability to hit for power and for average. Desme has not disappointed in either of those categories this season, especially with the Ports, for whom he is batting .303 with 18 homers and a .638 SLG in 59 games. Desme is only one homerun away from being the first 30 homer-40 stolen base man in the A's system in as long as anyone in the organization can remember.

"I have been surprised [with those numbers.] I don't really sit down at the beginning of the season and say, 'I want these stats.' I just let it play out throughout the season and see where it goes," Desme said.

"It has been a surprise, especially the stolen bases, because I never really stole in college this much. It has been really nice."

Desme hails from Bakersfield, California, so coming to the Ports and the California League was a bit of a homecoming for the Cal Poly alum. Happy to be back in the Golden State, Desme has responded with improved numbers across the board as compared to his stint with the Cougars in the Midwest League. Desme had 259 at-bats with the Cougars and, as of Thursday, was sitting on 218 at-bats with Stockton. He has improved his average by 29 points with the Ports, his slugging percentage by more than 125 points, his on-base percentage by nearly 60 points, his walk total by 10, his homer total by seven and his RBI total by 11.

"I haven't noticed a difference [between the two leagues] really, except obviously that the ball carries a lot better [in the Cal League] than it does out there. The parks are more hitter-friendly than in the Midwest League, but other than that, the talent level is pretty similar," Desme said.

"It's really nice to be back in California."

Even in college, Desme has always been a hitter who has racked up a lot of strike-outs and that has carried over into his professional career. Thus far this season, he has 144 strike-outs in 128 games. He has worked hard to have a good approach at the plate, however, and has seen some positive results recently. In August, Desme has whiffed 18 times in 84 at-bats after striking out 34 times in 110 at-bats in July.

"I just try to have a good, quality at-bat each time up. I'm just trying to get a pitch that I can do something with and not swing at a pitcher's pitch. I try to work counts and try to get into a count where I am more likely to get a pitch I can do something with," Desme said.

Missing virtually all of last season hasn't affected Desme's stamina this year, as his 128 games played through Tuesday put him among the leaders in games played in the A's system. As the season has worn on, Desme has gotten better, posting OPSs above 1000 in both July and August. His shoulder has been healthy and he has been especially pleased with how his wrist has responded to the long season.

"The wrist has felt good. I am happy with the way that has gone. It dragged on for so long, I wasn't really sure how it was going to be coming back and if it was going to feel good, but it feels pretty much normal, so I am happy with it," Desme said.

Desme will have an opportunity to add even more games to his ledger this fall when he takes part in the prospect showcase Arizona Fall League. He was told by the A's on Saturday that he would be taking part in the league and was visibly pleased with the news.

"It should be a really cool experience," Desme said.

Cougars Crush Beloit, Win 4th Straight

Kane County offense getting back on track during 4-game win streak

GENEVA, III. – Fueled by a 16-hit offensive attack and dominant work on the mound, the Kane County Cougars cruised past the Beloit Snappers, 7-0, Wednesday night at Elfstrom Stadium. The Cougars won their fourth in a row, enjoyed their most lopsided win this month and posted their first shutout since July 16. They look to sweep the four-game set with Beloit on Thursday night.

Mike Spina got the Cougars rolling right away with a first-inning RBI single off Daniel Osterbrock (6-10). Then Franklin Hernandez singled home Leonardo Gil in the third to make it 2-0. The Cougars used a four-run fifth to break open the game. Spina and Tyler Ladendorf each drove in one, and Chris Berroa notched a 10-game hitting streak with a two-run single. A Jeremy Barfield single in the sixth plated Steve Parker to account for the 7-0 final. Six Cougars had multiple hits, with Spina and Barfield collecting three apiece.

Murphy Smith (1-2) recorded his first pro victory. He gave up one hit over five innings with two walks and five strikeouts. Jose Guzman fanned seven over three relief innings and Scott Deal handled the ninth for the shutout. Smith's victory was the first by a Cougars starting pitcher other than Anivioris Ramirez in the last 19 games.

The Cougars (28-31, 69-60) and Snappers (24-35, 51-78) conclude the four-game set Thursday night at 6:30 CT. Kenny Smalley (9-7, 2.49) will oppose Liam Hendriks (2-4, 3.49) before the Cougars continue the eight-game homestand Friday against Wisconsin.