



SEATTLE MARINERS NEWS CLIPS

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Fishing | Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu lands 17-pound salmon

Wakamatsu lands large king while fly-fishing in Puget Sound.

By Mark Yuasa

Seattle Times staff reporter

When Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu looks for relief it doesn't always come from the bullpen.

In this case, it was off a Puget Sound shoreline on the Kitsap Peninsula, where he was on a fishing outing with Keith Robbins, owner of A Spot Tail Salmon Guide.

For Wakamatsu, fishing has been a passion since childhood. And it's a perfect balance to the high-pressure job of being a major-league manager.

On Monday, he took advantage of a break before a game against the Angels.

The morning fog bank was thick as pea soup as Wakamatsu and Robbins headed to the fishing spot.

"It was foggy and we weren't going very fast," Wakamatsu said. "The shore was probably 100 feet off, and we hit a sand bar and got beached there for a little bit."

Robbins said moments before he had looked at his Global Positioning System, then glanced down into the water and saw the bottom coming up fast.

"I said, 'oh no, I've got to move out,' and a few seconds later we were stuck in the mud," Robbins said. "It was absolutely the most embarrassing thing that has ever happened to me in the boat."

Wakamatsu jokingly asked Robbins if he'd make it back in time to get to the ballpark. But the tide was starting to rise, and they were off the beach an hour later.

Robbins walked Wakamatsu up the beach, and showed him where to fish.

"I caught a flounder and a bullhead," said Wakamatsu, who was using a light six weight rod. "A half an hour later, I was casting, and ended up catching that king on a red-and-white clouser fly.

"It pulled a lot harder than that bullhead. To hook that thing and watch it come out of the water. This [fish] was taking my line out, and it took me almost to the end of the backing. One more run and it would have taken my fly line with him.

"I have been fishing a lot in the Sound, and didn't know that [catching a king this summer] was such a rarity at the time."

It took him 15 minutes to land the hatchery king that weighed 17.2 pounds.

"That was the biggest king I've heard of caught off the beach in Puget Sound on a fly," Robbins said. "It was just unbelievable to catch a king that big. He [Wakamatsu] was totally stoked.

"I was almost shaking from being so embarrassed or depressed, and then going to elated in a matter of seconds."

Wakamatsu's big catch also got the attention of players in the clubhouse.

Ken Griffey Jr. wisecracked to reporters that they should ask Wakamatsu about the fish Griffey said the manager caught at Pike Place Market.

"I think I saw the price tag on it," Griffey said.

And whatever became of the salmon?

Monday afternoon, Mariner Mike Sweeney cleaned the fish, and it became part of the clubhouse dinner.

Wakamatsu's passion for fishing started as a kid when his family lived for two years in Bremerton while his father helped build a skyscraper in Seattle.

"We used to go for lingcod and salmon in [Puget Sound] when I was really small, but most of the fishing I've done was down on the Columbia [River] or in the Bay Area," Wakamatsu said. "I remember fishing on the Trinity River with my dad and uncle, and we didn't catch anything. We were walking away upstream and a guy comes in right behind us, fly-fishing [and] pulled four fish out of there."

Wakamatsu and bench coach Ty Van Burkleo got hooked on fly-fishing about 10 years ago when the two were coaches at Anaheim.

"I had fished with my father, brother and family for years [using] conventional [gear]," Wakamatsu said. "I walked into a Provo [Utah] Fly Shop one time when we were both over in Anaheim, and it was something I always wanted to try. I thought it was a graceful thing to take up, and a challenge. I fell in love with it."

Before his recent outing, Wakamatsu and Van Burkleo went fly-fishing in June.

"We went down to Gig Harbor and had a great day," Wakamatsu said. "Ty got a coho, and we caught 20 to 25 sea-run [cutthroat] and I got a nice 18-inch sea-run."

In the offseason he fills his free time with fishing trips.

"I like to go whenever I can with the boys [Jacob and Lucas] and my daughter [Jadyn]," Wakamatsu said. "I really want to get my daughter into fly-fishing, but they haven't gotten into [it] yet. And down there [in Texas] there isn't a lot of trout fishing, but I started fishing for largemouth bass on a fly."

"I try to get out as much as I can outside of their athletic schedule. It is our getaway, and our family hobby with the kids."

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Baseball rookie a veteran hockey enthusiast

Thursday, 09.03.2009 / 11:00 AM / NHL Insider

By Rocky Bonanno - NHL.com Staff Writer

It's not often that a Major League Baseball rookie is tabbed to catch the ceremonial first pitch before a game. But when the pitcher is an NHL defenseman, might as well call on the only Canadian on the roster to catch the pitch.

And that's how outfielder Michael Saunders of the Seattle Mariners earned the honor of catching the ceremonial first pitch from Vancouver Canucks defenseman Willie Mitchell on July 27 before an 11-4 home loss against the Toronto Blue Jays at Safeco Field.

"The team just said, 'Would you like to catch the first pitch?' I guess they picked me for the Canadian tie," Saunders said. "He threw a strike too, which was good. He just ran out there and threw it right down the middle. He's a lefty; he made me look good back there."

"There wasn't time for hockey talk afterward, but he knew I was big a Canucks fan."

Saunders, 22, who made his MLB debut only two days earlier, went 1-for-4 with a run scored and two strikeouts.

Saunders, who hails from Victoria, British Columbia -- about 70 miles from Seattle -- is one of a small fraternity of Canadian-born players currently active in MLB. Growing up a Canucks fan, Saunders played his fair share of hockey but also excelled in baseball.

"It got to the point where, as I got older, I started paring down sports. I played hockey in winter and baseball in summer," he said. "Canadians, most of us lean to hockey, but I got more exposure with baseball, travel-wise, playing for the national team. I just fell in love with the game. That determined my choice in the end.

"I was scouted for major junior A, but I gave up hockey when I was a junior in high school because I was getting ready to graduate. So a few major junior A teams talked to me, but I had already made up my mind that I'd go with baseball"

After attending Tallahassee Community College in Florida, Saunders began his pro ball career in 2005 with the Everett AquaSox of the Northwest League (Class A short season).

At 6-foot-4 and 210 pounds, Saunders is comparable in size to Carolina center Eric Staal and Calgary defenseman Jay Bouwmeester. In high school, he played for the Victoria Racquet Club Kings of the British Columbia Minor Hockey Association, the same program that produced NHL players Matt Pettinger, Kent Manderville and Mel Bridgman.

"Growing up I was a center, all the way through my hockey career," Saunders said. "I still miss it. I have fun every year, go back home and skate at the rink. I don't regret my decision at all. It's tough to give up something that you've done for so long. In any sport, any profession, you have to make sacrifices."

The Canucks were a big part of Saunders' youth. "I was a big Vancouver Canucks fan, I still am to this day. My favorite player was Bobby Orr because of my dad. On Saturday night we'd watch old videos, highlights tapes. For myself, the guy I liked was Pavel Bure, especially in the early to mid '90s. I still remember '94, that heartbreaking loss to the Rangers."

Though the 8-year-old Saunders was crushed by Vancouver's seven-game loss to the Rangers in the 1994 Stanley Cup Final, he sees reason to be optimistic about the 2009-10 edition of the Canucks.

"Andrew Raycroft will take over the backup role and that will be good to give Roberto Luongo a day off now and then," he said.

"Getting Mikael Samuelsson, that's big. He's a veteran presence on a young team, and he's won a few Stanley Cups.

"Kevin Bieksa, when healthy, he's a big offensive presence from the d-line which is nice, but he needs to stay healthy.

"I think they've always been a solid team. They're in a bit of a rebuilding stage, and to do what they've done during that time, I'm exited for the years down the road."

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Ken Griffey Jr. open to playing another year

By Janie McCauley

Associated Press Sports Writer

OAKLAND, Calif. - Ken Griffey Jr. sure seems like someone who wants to stick around the Seattle Mariners for another season.

"If it works out for both sides, I'm fine," Griffey told The Associated Press before the Mariners opened a four-game series against the Oakland Athletics on Thursday night. "We'll figure it out at the end of the year. We've still got 30 days."

Griffey is as happy as he's been in years, back where he began his 21-year big league career in 1989 and is still beloved despite leaving for nearly nine seasons with the Cincinnati Reds. He believes he can still produce. While Griffey won't go as far as to say he's leaning toward playing in 2010, he'd be game for another year in Seattle if the situation was right for both himself and the club. And as long as his body holds up, of course.

The 39-year-old Griffey returned to the lineup as the designated hitter batting in the cleanup spot against Oakland after missing six games with inflammation in his left knee. He entered with a .221 batting average, 14 homers and 43 RBIs.

Griffey said he has always waited until the end of a season to evaluate things and make decisions, discussing the future with his wife and kids, too. And this year won't be any different, even when he faces constant questions about whether this year might be the last in his decorated career.

Griffey is amused by the constant speculation of will he or won't he? That's just what happens when you spent 11 seasons as the face of a franchise then came back for another go. He has brought a spirit and energy back to Safeco Field this season.

"They all want to know," Griffey said with a smile.

The slugger said his representatives have had preliminary talks with the Mariners and another meeting would take place soon after the season ends.

Griffey was an All-Star in each of his final 10 seasons in Seattle until he got the trade he asked for to Cincinnati in 2000. He rejoined the Mariners in February, signing a one-year contract worth \$2 million, plus a possible \$3 million in incentives.

This club certainly has appreciated Griffey's leadership and veteran presence in the clubhouse. He dug his fingers into Ichiro Suzuki's armpits Thursday while the star leadoff hitter was on the floor doing his array of stretches.

"This is easy," Junior said. "He has no body fat. He's all muscle and ribs."

"Ahhhh," Suzuki laughed. "Please. ... You are the master!"

Later, Griffey made the rounds behind the batting cage to offer handshakes and hugs to members of the A's. The Coliseum is the spot where he picked up his first career hit in his major league debut, on April 3, 1989.

He has enjoyed his role as a mentor for the young players and believes this franchise is close to turning the corner.

"I want to be part of this," he said. "We're building something."

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Originally published Thursday, September 3, 2009 at 10:07 PM

Mariners show faith in right-hander Ian Snell

Mariners starter Ian Snell needed a huge dose of generosity from manager Don Wakamatsu to be credited with this 7-4 win over the Oakland Athletics on Thursday night. Snell had watched his team swat three homers before the game was even four innings old, but kept running into trouble whenever his leads got beyond a run.

By Geoff Baker

Seattle Times staff reporter

OAKLAND, Calif. - No pitcher wants his manager making a mound visit in the fourth inning, especially when he could have sent the pitching coach instead.

And it was no different for Mariners starter Ian Snell, a guy who needed a huge dose of generosity from manager Don Wakamatsu to be credited with this 7-4 win over the Oakland Athletics on Thursday night. Snell had watched his team swat three homers before the game was even four innings old, but kept running into trouble whenever his leads got beyond a run.

That brought Wakamatsu out for a less-than-pleasant chat with his pitcher about controlling the running game and staying aggressive with hitters.

"It was PG-13; I can't say it on camera," Snell said of what he was told.

It's one thing to give a pitcher a stern talking-to, quite another to get him to take it seriously. Snell had his share of tongue-lashings while with the Pittsburgh Pirates, and it got to the point where nobody was hearing anybody anymore.

The Mariners don't want to go that route and are working overtime with Snell between starts to improve things like his mound tempo and pitches. They are also building what Wakamatsu calls a "belief system" with players, helping them understand that while they'll be constructively criticized, they also won't get the rug pulled from under their feet.

Which is why Snell still had a rug under him with two on in the fifth inning, despite a pitch count bulging up to 107 as he notched the third out that would qualify him for a victory.

"It tells me he has faith in me and knows I'm going to do my job and keep them where they're at," Snell said.

Wakamatsu was sweating it out, his bullpen ready just in case Snell botched the lead provided on two-run homers in the first by Franklin Gutierrez and Bill Hall, off onetime Mariners starter Brett Tomko, and another in the fourth from Kenji Johjima.

"When you go out there early in a ballgame like that," Wakamatsu said, "or you talk to him like that, you, in turn, want to show a belief system that maybe he can get a win out of that.

"So, yeah, I had somebody hot just in case. But I wanted him to at least go five."

It all worked out in the end as the Mariners won a third straight game, moved seven over .500 in their search for a winning season and finally displayed some offensive firepower completely lacking the past week. Mike Carp notched his first extra-base hit as a major-leaguer, a double in the sixth, and later added a single in the ninth as the Mariners tacked on a key insurance run.

David Aardsma retired the side in the ninth for his 34th save - and third in four days - after Chris Jakubauskas helped stabilize things in the sixth and seventh. Daric Barton had homered off Mark Lowe in the eighth to make it a two-run game, but Gutierrez got down a squeeze bunt in the ninth to score pinch-runner Jack Hannahan and restore the three-run cushion.

In the big picture of where things fit in for next year, the progress the Mariners make with Snell will be huge. Snell is the one guy in a rotation filled with No. 4 and No. 5 starters who has the strikeout ability to be more of a legitimate No. 3 guy behind Felix Hernandez.

Though Snell now has four straight wins, his stuff hasn't always been there. It certainly wasn't on this night and he seemed appreciative that Wakamatsu left him in as long as he did.

"I think I got a little too relaxed," Snell said of the 4-0 lead he'd been handed after an inning, only to see it narrowed to 4-3 by the third. "My ball was just moving all over the place. It felt like I couldn't throw a strike."

So the Mariners will work with Snell again between outings in hopes he can throw a strike the next time. They'll hammer home the need to be more aggressive with a big lead, control the runners behind him and not get thrown off his game so easily.

"It's really just how much we care about this kid and think that he has a chance," Wakamatsu said.

And the Mariners will need Snell firing on all cylinders for them to have a chance once these games start to matter again next April.

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Ichiro is closing in on two hit milestones

Ichiro enters Oakland series needing seven hits for a record ninth straight 200-hit season and seven hits to reach 2,000 for his major-league career.

By Geoff Baker

Seattle Times staff reporter

OAKLAND, Calif. - Ichiro, back in the lineup for a second straight day after missing eight games, told Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu that his problematic calf muscle is starting to feel better.

So it's all systems go as Ichiro prepares to topple one and possibly two big milestones.

The first to fall will be his 2,000th hit in the major leagues. He's just six hits away after going 1 for 4 on Thursday, so he has a chance to get that in Oakland.

"We'll try to keep an open dialogue if he needs a day," Wakamatsu said.

The Japanese media is on hand and ready for it to happen this weekend, having sent in reinforcements.

Ichiro, in his ninth season with the Mariners, will become the first player to reach 2,000 hits in less than 10 seasons.

The other big mark will be Ichiro's ninth consecutive 200-hit season. He came into Thursday night's game with 188 hits this season. That would break the record of eight he shares with Willie Keeler, who accomplished the feat from 1894 to 1901.

Lopez back to second

Jose Lopez said teammates were kidding him about being the team's new first baseman after he played there Wednesday.

"I was like, 'What's the big deal?' " he said. "I played 15 games there last season."

The difference is, last season he was replacing Miguel Cairo, with Richie Sexson already released, as was Jose Vidro a month later.

On Wednesday, Lopez played instead of Mike Carp, a top prospect who could have a future with the Mariners at first base.

When Lopez was asked which position he wanted to play, he laughed.

"That's not me who gets to decide," he said.

But Lopez said he will play winter ball this year and work at improving his skills at second base.

"That's what I do every year," he said. "I try to get better at my position. This year, it's no different."

Note

• **Ken Griffey Jr.** returned to the lineup, starting at DH. Griffey had missed the past six games with inflammation in his left knee.

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September 3, 2009 at 9:50 AM

Dave Niehaus talks faster than I can type

Posted by Larry Stone

Seattle Times Blog

The Wall Street Journal conducted an interesting study to determine the chattiest television play-by-play announcer in baseball. They monitored the first scoreless inning of every team's home broadcast last Friday and counted how many words were said per minute by the lead announcer.

Our own Dave Niehaus checked in at No. 10 out of 30 announcers at 84.14 words a minute. The Mariners played the Royals last Friday, with Felix Hernandez facing Brian Bannister.

Topping the list was the Dodger legend, Vin Scully, at 143.51 WPM...but that comes with a serious asterisk. Scully, still going strong at age 81, is the only broadcaster in either league who works solo, without a color man. It stands to reason he'd utter more words than anyone else.

The chattiest announcer with a partner to share time turned out to be the Cardinals' Dan McLaughlin at 109.92 words per minute. Others over 100 WPM were the Nationals' Bob Carpenter (101.93), the Reds' George Grande (102.06) and the Diamondbacks' Daron Sutton (100.36).

The most laconic broadcaster was the Giants' Duane Kuiper (55.44). It runs in the family. His brother, Glen Kuiper of the A's, came in 27th at 65.00 WPM.

(Seattle Times photo by Dean Rutz)

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SEPTEMBER 2, 2009, 9:55 P.M. ET

Meet Baseball's Chattiest TV Announcers

The Wall Street Journal

If it seems like your baseball team's play-by-play man jabbers endlessly at 1,000 words a minute, well, he doesn't. But the St. Louis Cardinals' Dan McLaughlin comes closer than most of his peers, talking at an estimated 109.9 words every 60 seconds.

In a quest to figure out how much play-by-play men actually talk, we listened to the first scoreless inning of every team's home broadcast last Friday-tally counter in hand-and calculated how many words they uttered per minute. The Yankees' Michael Kay and the White Sox's Ken "Hawk" Harrelson may be considered by some to be prolific talkers, but to be scientific about it, they're no worse than Houston's Bill Brown or Seattle's Dave Niehaus.

Mr. McLaughlin drove up his word count with a riff comparing Albert Pujols to Babe Ruth (based on how many extra-base-hits each player had in his first 500 at-bats), as well as expressing the opinion that Chris Duncan, a former Cardinal, was cut too quickly by the Boston Red Sox.

Apparently, announcers for bad teams feel an urge to fill dead air. Trailing Mr. McLaughlin was the Nationals' Bob Carpenter at 102.3 words per minute, the Reds' George Grande (102.1) and the Diamondbacks' Daron Sutton (100.4).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the laidback play-by-play guys mostly reside in California. The Giants' Duane Kuiper was the quietest at 55.4 words per minute, and the Padres, Athletics and Angels also were among the bottom six teams. Dodgers' legend Vin Scully smashed that trend with 143.4 words per minute, but that makes sense: He's the only announcer in the league who works the booth without a partner.

-David Biderman

Yakety Yak

Here are the estimated number of words spoken per minute by each play-by-play announcer in baseball. Figures were calculated by counting the number of words spoken in one non-scoring inning in one day.

TEAM WORDS PER MINUTE TEAM WORDS PER MINUTE

Vin Scully Dodgers* 143.51 Rich Waltz Marlins 78.08
Dan McLaughlin Cardinals 109.93 Mario Impemba Tigers 75.39
Bob Carpenter Nationals 102.33 Michael Kay Yankees 73.4
George Grande Reds 102.06 Gary Cohen Mets 73.04
Daron Sutton Dbacks 100.36 Matt Underwood Indians 72.02
Ryan Lefebvre Royals 96.71 Len Kasper Cubs 71.5
Brian Anderson Brewers 96.06 Ken Harrelson White Sox 70.98
Dick Bremer Twins 94.81 Josh Lewin Rangers 70.57
Bill Brown Astros 89.11 Dewayne Staats Rays 69.69
Dave Niehaus Mariners 84.14 Steve Physioc Angels 68.26
Tom McCarthy Phillies 82.97 Gary Thorne Orioles 66.97
Don Orsillo Red Sox 81.73 Glen Kuiper Athletics 65.00
Tim Neverett Pirates 81.55 Jamie Campbell Blue Jays 62.66
Chip Caray Braves 78.70 Mark Neely Padres 61.64
Drew Goodman Rockies 78.51 Duane Kuiper Giants 55.44

*Mr. Scully is the only announcer in the Dodgers' broadcast booth

September 3, 2009 at 8:31 AM

The National League is good for what AL's you

Posted by Larry Stone

Seattle Times Blog

Did you notice that interleague play resumes today? OK, it's one game, Cubs vs. White Sox at Wrigley Field, the makeup of a rainout on June 16.

No matter what the outcome, the American League dominated interleague play for the sixth straight year, holding a 137-114 advantage heading into today's showdown between the most disappointing team in each league. Oh, and the American League won the All-Star Game for the 12th straight year that it's been played to conclusion.

The NL IS the defending World Series champion, and has won two of the last three. I'll give them that. But I couldn't help but notice these three recent results that must say something:

Brad Penny, released by the Red Sox on Aug. 26 with a 5.61 ERA, 160 hits allowed in 131 2/3 innings, .299 opponents' batting average. Signed by Giants, makes his 2009 NL debut last night, throws eight shutout innings against the Philles, giving up five hits in a 4-0 win. (That's Penny in action last night in the above photo).

John Smoltz, released by the Red Sox on Aug. 17 with an 8.32 ERA, 59 hits allowed in 40 innings, with 33 strikeouts, .341 opponents' batting average. Signed by Cardinals, 1-0 with a 0.82 ERA in two starts, 7 hits allowed in 11 innings with 15 strikeouts, .184 opponents' batting average. Smoltz goes tonight against the Brewers.

Cliff Lee, traded from Indians to Phillies on July 31. With Cleveland, 7-9, 3.14 ERA, 165 hits allowed in 152 innings, 107 strikeouts, .278 opponents' batting average. With Phillies, 5-1, 1.80 ERA, 34 hits allowed in 45 innings, 44 strikeouts, .211 opponents batting average.

(And one more I forget earlier):

Matt Holliday, trade from A's to Cardinals on July 24. In 93 games with Oakland, Holliday had 346 at-bats, 11 homers, 54 RBIs, .286/.378/456, OPS .832, OPS+ 124. In 36 games with St. Louis, Holliday has 136 at-bats, nine homers, 36 RBIs, .375/.437/.691, OPS 1.128, OPS+ 193.

I'm just sayin'.

(Associated Press photo)

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September 3, 2009 at 11:24 PM

Mariners 7, Athletics 4: Home runs power Seattle to victory

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

Not everyday do we see the Mariners hit three home runs before the game is even four innings old. But that's what Franklin Gutierrez, Bill Hall and Kenji Johjima did tonight in a 7-4 win by the Mariners over the Oakland Athletics.

And just to show the M's haven't forgotten their roots, Gutierrez even dropped down a bunt to get a seventh run across in the ninth inning. That Gutierrez is quite a ballplayer. You have to like what you saw tonight from the guys who could play a role on the 2010 team. Gutierrez will be there, obviously, but Mike Carp and Hall also came through.

Ian Snell gets the win, but needed all the help he could get. David Aardsma just got his 34th save. I'd say 40 is well within reach.

Snell was fortunate that manager Don Wakamatsu allowed him to stay in the game as long as he did. Cameras showed Wakamatsu engaged in serious conversation with catcher Johjima in the dugout after his homer in the fourth inning made it a 6-3 game.

Wakamatsu told me he was going over the strategy needed to help Snell last five innings in the game. The camera showed Wakamatsu emphasizing his point rather emphatically to Johjima, but the manager insisted there was nothing more to it than trying to get Snell through the minimum.

By the bottom of the fourth, though, Wakamatsu was fed up and made a mound visit of his own. Snell had just allowed a stolen base and was on the verge of letting the A's creep back in the game.

"That was really just about controlling the running game," Wakamatsu said. "This is a new guy we didn't have a chance to go through spring training with. And at that point, we weren't going to allow any more stolen bases. That was really the gist of the talk. And to be aggressive. We've had that talk with everybody. We just really haven't had the luxury of pounding it into everybody."

And yeah, Wakamatsu pounded it home. Snell said the discussion was "PG-13" and could not be repeated.

"I think I got a little too relaxed," Snell said of the 4-0 lead he'd been handed after an inning, only to see it narrowed to 4-3 by the third. "My ball was just moving all over the place. It felt like I couldn't throw a strike."

Wakamatsu showed something by leaving Snell in there, though. There were two on and two out in the fifth with a reliever warmed up and the manager still allowed Snell to face Daric Barton -- who wound up homering later on in the game. This time though, Snell got a flyball out and qualified for the win.

"We try to give a guy a belief system," Wakamatsu said. "When you go out there early in a ballgame like that, or you talk to him like that, you, in turn, want to show a belief system that maybe he can get a win out of that.

"So, yeah, I had somebody hot just in case. But I wanted him to at least go five."

This kind of stuff matters a whole lot more than these games, or even finishing .500. The season is over, for all intents and purposes. But the M's need Snell to do more next year. They want him with their "program" and not alienated like he felt in Pittsburgh. Keeping him on board, while constructively criticizing him, is a delicate act.

But hey, if it's good enough for Felix Hernandez, it's good enough for anybody on this staff.

That's what I like most about this year's coaching staff. It doesn't play favorites as much as I've seen previous staffs do. The same rules, for the most part, seem to apply to everyone and players are expected to fall into line.

If they don't, there are consequences. But the carrot is also dangled along with the stick on nights like this. Because Snell was allowed to pick up his win. A lot of teams would not have let a guy go 107 pitches with what he was throwing tonight.

So, a fourth straight win for Snell, And a third in a row for the M's.

Three more against these A's and they aren't exactly sending the Big Three to the mound anymore.

Clayton Mortensen has been inserted in the rotation for tomorrow instead of Vin Mazzaro. We could see some more big hits by Seattle before this series is done.

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September 3, 2009 at 5:52 PM

Ichiro set to take aim at milestone targets

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

Ichiro has told Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu that his problematic calf muscle is starting to feel better, even though he's now playing daily on it. That means, for now, it's all systems "go" this weekend as Ichiro prepares to topple one and possibly two big milestones.

The first to fall will be his 2,000th hit, which he's only seven away from. Odds are that he'll get that in this series here in Oakland if he's allowed to play all four games.

"We'll try to keep an open dialogue if he needs a day," Wakamatsu said.

Ichiro has not gone hitless in consecutive games since Aug. 13-15 of last season, so he should come close, as I said, to No. 2,000 by Saturday or Sunday. The Japanese media is certainly on-hand and ready for it all to go down this weekend, having sent in reinforcements.

If Ichiro somehow goes on a hitting rampage the next two days, he'd have a shot at the fastest 2,000-hits ever -- a mark held by Al Simmons over 1,390 contests. Ichiro has played 1,398 games, so, odds are, he'll not catch Simmons. George Sisler sits second at 1,414 games, so Ichiro has an excellent shot at besting his mark.

We know how much Sisler means to Ichiro in the context of history and both their places in it so that is no small feat.

Ichiro will also become the first player to reach 2,000 hits in under 10 seasons. This is his ninth, but remember, they play more games per season than they did when Simmons and Sisler played.

The other big mark will then be Ichiro's ninth consecutive 200-hit season, which he is a dozen shy of at the moment. That would break the record he shares with Willie Keeler, who accomplished the feat from 1894-1901.

In other news, Ken Griffey Jr. is back in the lineup, as expected, while Jose Lopez moves back to his regular second base spot after a stint at first. Lopez told me his teammates spent much of yesterday kidding around with him about being the new first baseman.

"I was like 'What's the big deal?'," he said. "I played 15 games there last season."

The difference is, he was replacing Miguel Cairo back then, with Richie Sexson already released as was Jose Vidro a month later. Yesterday, Lopez was replacing Mike Carp, a top prospect with the Mariners who might have a future at the first base position.

When I asked Lopez what position he saw himself at, he laughed.

"That's not me who gets to decide," he said.

But he pledged to go down to winter ball this year and work at improving his skills at second base.

"That's what I do every year," he said. "I try to get better at my position. This year, it's no different."

A's may help decide M's improvement

Mariners Notes: With seven games left, Seattle needs to do well vs. Oakland

LARRY LARUE; The Tacoma News Tribune

Published: 09/04/09 12:05 am

OAKLAND - The Oakland Athletics figure heavily in the final record Seattle will put up this season. Counting Thursday's first game of a four-game series, the two teams play one another in seven of the Mariners' final 28 games.

The Athletics are also have the worst record of any team Seattle will face in the final month.

Seattle began the night 9-3 against Oakland this season, with a total of 70 wins. Should they win five of the last seven against the Athletics, and 10 of their other 21 games, the Mariners would end the season 85-72.

Last year, when they lost 101 games, the Mariners, Nationals and Padres went down to the final week to determine which team would have the worst record in baseball.

Look at the same three teams through Wednesday's games, and Seattle had 70 wins, the Padres 59, the Nationals 46.

Variety fine with Hall

Bill Hall has a fantasy, where the Mariners let him suit up behind the plate one inning, then pitch the ninth inning for a save in the same game.

"That would be great," he said.

Probably not going to happen, but the Mariners are delighted to use Hall in the role Willie Bloomquist used to fill. In the 11 games he has played for the Mariners since coming in trade from Milwaukee, Hall has played left field, right field, third base and second base.

“We’re more versatile now than we’ve probably been all year, and seeing how Bill has played makes you comfortable he can do the job,” manager Don Wakamatsu. “He’s athletic enough to play infield or outfield.”

On Thursday, it was left field. On Wednesday, second base - something of a test to see whether Hall would be comfortable there. He was.

It doesn’t mean the Mariners are preparing to move Jose Lopez, who started Thursday at second base for the 122nd time this season. In those games, by the way, the Mariners were 61-60 going into their game against Oakland.

Short hops

Mariners catchers lead the American League in throwing out opposing base runners, having caught 34 of 94 runners trying to steal against them. That 37.2 percent is the highest in the league. ...

When **Felix Hernandez** and **David Aardsma** beat the Angels, 3-0, on Wednesday, it was Seattle’s 21st win of the season when scoring three runs or fewer. That’s eight more wins in that fashion than any team in the league, and only St. Louis has as many in baseball. It’s also a franchise single-season record, breaking the old mark of 19 set in 1989. ...

Russell Branyan skipped this trip to get treatment in Seattle on his ailing back. The Mariners hope his herniated disk will improve enough to allow him to take batting practice upon their return, but his playing again this season is in doubt. ... Salary drive! Over the past 11 games, **Mike Sweeney** has batted .421, raising his season average from .228 to .265.

On tap

Seattle continues its series in Oakland today with a 7:05 p.m. game that will be televised on FSN. Probable starting pitchers: Seattle’s **Ryan Rowland-Smith** (2-2, 3.95) vs. **Vin Mazzaro** (4-9, 5.32).

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Subpar M’s still better than A’s, 7-4

MARINERS: First-inning home runs by Gutierrez and Hall support shaky effort from starter Snell

LARRY LARUE; The Tacoma News Tribune

Published: 09/04/09 12:05 am

OAKLAND - It wasn’t their best game of the season - it wasn’t even their best game of the week.

It didn’t have to be.

The Seattle Mariners got a wobbly five-inning start from Ian Snell, made two flabbergasting errors in the field and scored only three runs after the first inning - and still beat the Oakland Athletics on Thursday, 7-4.

It wasn’t as if they tried to play down to the competition or took Oakland and it’s 59-75 record for granted. The Mariners just had one of those games, and managed to play well enough when it mattered most to win, anyway.

“It was a game of momentum, and we took it with four early runs and then Snell pitched like he was trying to hold a lead, and Oakland kind of took the momentum back,” manager Don Wakamatsu said.

The first inning certainly helped, when Franklin Gutierrez, then Bill Hall hit two-run home runs off ex-Mariner right-hander Brett Tomko. And, in the fourth, Kenji Johjima hit a two-run home run of his own.

Hall’s was a tape-measure shot.

“I knew that one was gone,” he said, laughing because he’d assumed a Safeco Field drive was out Wednesday, and it wasn’t. “You always want to hit one with your new team. The funny thing was, I swung easier on that pitch than I have at others I hit hard.”

For a while, it looked like Snell would need all that and more.

“I couldn’t throw my sinker for a strike, I couldn’t throw my change-up for a strike, and I was trying to throw the fastball down the middle,” Snell said. “I wasn’t trying to nibble.”

Given that 4-0 first-inning lead, Snell proceeded to give up three hits, a walk and two runs of his own in the Athletics first.

He gave up a third run in the second inning that wasn’t entirely his fault. Yes, he’d allowed three more hits in the inning, but when he got a two-out ground ball to shortstop Jack Wilson, it appeared he’d get out of the inning.

Wilson tried to underhand the ball to Jose Lopez at second base - and held the ball an instant too long, lobbing it perhaps 10 feet over Lopez’s head for an error.

A run scored and it was 4-3.

Snell, rarely an economical pitcher, wasn’t in this game. And when he walked two hitters in the fourth inning, Wakamatsu walked to the mound and ... well ... aired his pitcher out.

“What did Wak say to me? I’m afraid that’s PG-13,” Snell said, laughing.

“I told him he had to control the running game, that he was pitching defensively and he had to believe in his stuff,” Wakamatsu said.

He also mentioned Snell needed four more outs to qualify for a win.

It worked. Snell got out of the fourth inning, then the fifth inning. By that time, however, he’d thrown 107 pitches.

Acquired from Pittsburgh last month, Snell has now won four consecutive games, but no one is calling him an innings eater. He hasn’t gotten through six innings in any of those wins, though he’s thrown well over 100 pitches in three of them.

Once Snell was gone, Seattle had four innings to finish. Chris Jakubauskas, the rookie out of independent league baseball, took two of those himself, striking out three without allowing a run.

“I had a little trouble getting the ball down, but with a lead, I thought ‘If you’re going to beat me, you’re going to have to hit me. I’m not walking anybody,’” Jakubauskas said.

“Chris was the turning point tonight, because he shifted the momentum back to us by shutting them down for two innings,” Wakamatsu said. “We really needed that, and he gave it to us.”

Mark Lowe took the eighth inning, gave up a solo home run to the .180-hitting Daric Barton - then went about his business and finished the eighth.

Two run lead for David Aardsma in the ninth? Wakamatsu wanted a bigger edge.

After singles by Mike Carp and Johjima opened the Seattle ninth, Wakamatsu had Wilson bunt the runners up a base. Oakland responded by intentionally walking Ichiro Suzuki to set up the double play.

Wakamatsu flashed the sign - squeeze - and Gutierrez dropped it perfectly, scoring pinch-runner Jack Hannahan with an insurance run. It was the first time in memory a Mariner has had a home run and squeeze bunt in the same game.

Aardsma made it look easy, despite a two-out error by Lopez.

That’s 34 saves for Aardsma, three in the last three games, and 71 wins for Seattle - or 10 more than all of last season. It gave the Mariners a three-game winning streak, and have won eight of their last 11.

That hasn’t helped them close on Boston in the wild card race - they remain eight games back - but they’ve managed to pull within a game of Tampa Bay, one of three teams ahead of them.

And they did it without their best game.

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Recap: Oakland vs. Seattle

By Sports Network; The Sports Network

Published: 09/03/09 10:13 pm | Updated: 09/04/09 12:19 am

Franklin Gutierrez, Bill Hall and Kenji Johjima each hit two-run homers off Brett Tomko, pushing Seattle to a 7-4 victory over the Oakland Athletics to open a four-game series.

Gutierrez drove in three runs as the Mariners won their third in a row and eighth in their last 11 tries. They've beaten the A's five straight times and moved to 10-3 against them in the season series.

Ian Snell (4-1) surrendered seven hits and three runs -- two earned -- over five innings to get the win.

"They're a pretty patient bunch of hitters over there," said Snell. "I was just trying to throw the fastball down the middle of the plate so they could hit it. It was just moving too much I guess. I gave my best and the offense did their job."

Chris Jakubauskas threw two scoreless innings. Mark Lowe allowed a run in the eighth, but David Aardsma pitched a hitless ninth for his 34th save of the year.

Tomko (3-3) was touched for eight hits and six runs over 5 2/3 frames, as the Athletics faltered for the seventh time in 11 contests. That included being swept in a three-game set at Seattle August 24-26.

Daric Barton homered and Kurt Suzuki drove in two runs for Oakland.

Ichiro Suzuki singled to start the game and Gutierrez followed with his 15th homer of the year, a shot to left. Adrian Beltre doubled with two outs, and it became 4-0 on Hall's blast to left.

"We got down early, but to get back in the game was remarkable for our offense," said A's outfielder Rajai Davis. "Sometimes they roll, but unfortunately for us it didn't roll for us."

Kurt Suzuki singled in two runs in the bottom of the first, and Oakland was within a run in the second when Jack Wilson's throwing error scored Adam Kennedy. But with runners at second and third, Snell fanned Jack Cust to end the inning.

Hall started the fourth with a base hit, and one out later Johjima launched a homer to left field.

Barton homered in the eighth before a Gutierrez squeeze scored Jack Hannahan in the ninth.

The season is teed up ...

Posted By Larry LaRue on September 3, 2009 at 2:46 pm

The Tacoma News Tribune Blog

Tonight the Mariners begin a four-game series in Oakland against the worst team they'll face in their 28 remaining games.

How important are the Athletics to the Mariners final 2009 record? Hugely - the two teams play seven times between now and the end of the year.

Sitting on 70 wins, it's obvious the Mariners best chance to take five or six games in the next four weeks is from Oakland (59-74)

Look at the rest of Seattle's final games and they play Texas six times, the Angels three, the White Sox three, the Yankees three, the Rays twice and the Blue Jays three times.

Figure it this way. If the Mariners win less than half their 21 games against the field - say, 10 games, and take five from Oakland, they'd finish 85-77.

From a 61-101 mark a year ago, that would be an amazing improvement - especially given the players they've used this season.

How extraordinary? Remember last September, how the worst-team-in-baseball derby came down to the final days between the Mariners, Nationals and Padres?

Today, the Mariners are still technically alive in the wild card derby - and the Nationals (46-88) and Padres (59-76) remain among the worst teams in the game.

The Mariners have tried to treat every opponent and each series the same all season, and will again in this one.

For fans, however, the next four games may be the key to where Seattle's final record stands.

Rainiers fall, must sweep last series

Rainiers: Tacoma drops 4-0 decision to Salt Lake and needs four straight wins over Colorado Springs

GRANT CLARK; For The Tacoma News Tribune

Published: 09/04/09 12:05 am

The scenario is simple for the Tacoma Rainiers - close out the regular season by sweeping four games from the Colorado Sky Sox and win the division.

Tacoma had a chance to pull within a single game of Pacific Coast League Pacific North Division leader Colorado Springs, but Salt Lake used a big seventh inning to post a 4-0 victory over the Rainiers on Thursday night at Cheney Stadium.

The Rainiers (71-69) begin a season-ending four-game homestand against Colorado Springs today at 7 p.m.

"If you would have told us two weeks ago we would be in this position, I'd take it," said Tacoma manager Daren Brown, whose team was 7 1/2 games behind the Sky Sox in late August before winning a season-high nine straight.

"We have a nice (pitching) rotation coming up with (Chris) Seddon, (Garrett) Olson, (Brandon) Morrow and (Gaby) Hernandez. All have been pitching very well for us lately."

The Sky Sox, who lost 6-5 to Portland on Thursday, have lost four consecutive games on four separate occasions this season, the last coming at home against Salt Lake (Aug. 27-30).

Should Tacoma and Colorado Springs finish tied at the end of the regular season the Sky Sox would claim the division crown based on a better winning percentage. Colorado Springs has played two fewer games than Tacoma, both rainouts that won't be made up.

Carlos Silva, on rehab assignment from the Seattle Mariners due to a right-shoulder inflammation, got the start for the Rainiers and threw a scoreless first inning, giving up one hit and striking out two.

Andy Baldwin took over from there and was lights out through his first five innings, retiring the first 12 batters he faced and striking out eight before surrendering his first hit in the seventh - a single by Terry Evans.

Matt Brown followed with a double, scoring Evans and getting Salt Lake on the scoreboard - and in the lead - 1-0.

Baldwin walked Ryan Budde to load the bases two batters later before being replaced by Justin Thomas.

"I thought Andy did a nice job tonight," Brown said. "(Salt Lake) got a bunt to start the seventh, then got a base hit.

"We were really one pitch away from getting out of it."

The Bees added three more runs - getting a two-out single from Brad Coon, which drove in two, and an RBI single from Freddy Sandoval - to push the lead to 4-0.

Adam Moore and Oswaldo Navarro each went 2-for-4 for the Rainiers in the loss.

On tap

Tacoma kicks off its final regular season series at 7 p.m. against Colorado Springs. The Rainiers, who have lost seven of 12 games to the Sky Sox this year, will start **Chris Seddon** (8-8, 4.55 ERA). The right-handed Seddon is 1-3 with a 5.75 ERA in his last six starts but is coming off a strong outing on Aug. 30 against Portland when he gave up two runs on five hits in six innings to pick up the victory. **Greg Smith** (1-1, 5.96) will take the mound for Colorado Springs.

Mariners lean on long ball in Oakland

Trio of two-run homers lifts Snell, Seattle to opening win

By Jane Lee / Special to MLB.com

09/04/09 2:35 AM ET

OAKLAND -- No doubt it's still early, but September has been rather kind to the Mariners thus far.

Entering Thursday's game against the A's coming off back-to-back home wins against the American League West-leading Angels to start off the month, Seattle was in a giving mood.

So when Oakland starter Brett Tomko dealt some pretty pitches, the Mariners gave them right back -- in none other form than the long ball, of course.

And not just any long ball, but rather two-run dingers.

Three of them.

Even though Seattle starter Ian Snell was a little too giving, as well, the offensive offering proved more than enough for a third straight victory, as the Mariners topped the A's, 7-4, on Thursday in the opener of a four-game set at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum.

With the win, the Mariners have now won 33 of 51 against the A's since the start of the 2007 season. This year alone, Seattle is 10-4 against Oakland.

Despite the home run glory that prevailed, though, Thursday's game wasn't as picturesque as the box score may have let on.

Yes, it will show that Snell notched the win to improve to 4-1. But the countless struggles faced by the right-handed pitcher probably won't be in there.

After the first two of the three two-run homers -- knocked out by Franklin Gutierrez and Bill Hall -- rang in the first inning against Tomko (3-3), Snell watched his own lead narrow far too quickly. By the fourth inning, he had turned a 4-0 lead into a 4-3 ballgame thanks to a two-run single by Kurt Suzuki in the first and an error at the hands of shortstop Jack Wilson in the second.

With two out in the fourth, Snell got a visit at the mound from manager Don Wakamatsu following a stolen base by Cliff Pennington.

"We weren't going to allow any more stolen bases at that point," Wakamatsu said. "That's basically what I went to talk to him about."

"It's really about controlling the running game. That's winning baseball."

Snell proceeded to walk Rajai Davis, but then got out of the inning unscathed. By that point, though, Snell -- along with Wakamatsu and Co. -- knew his night was close to done.

"It was a PG-13 game," admitted Snell, who was making his seventh start with Seattle since being traded from Pittsburgh on July 29. "I can't say things I want to say. Basically, my sinker was out of control, and so was my changeup. With those two out of the question, I was struggling."

Snell left the game after five innings, scattering three runs -- two earned -- on seven hits and four walks while fanning four.

"I think I got a little too relaxed," Snell admitted. "The ball was moving all over the place. They left me in to get the win, and I went out and gave it my best."

Snell knows his best wasn't there. He also knows Wakamatsu didn't have to let him go five, especially with one of the league's strongest bullpens in queue.

"That tells me he has a lot of faith in me," the 27-year-old pitcher said, "and that he knows I can do my job.

"I just don't like walking people, and that made it that much harder. I was off balance all night."

As was the norm, though, the bullpen was not. Entering the game with a 3.74 ERA, Seattle's relievers proved just as good as advertised, allowing just one run -- an eighth-inning homer by Daric Barton -- through four innings.

Leading the way was Chris Jakubauskas, who allowed just one hit and struck out three in two shutout innings. After Mark Lowe allowed the bullpen's lone mistake to Barton, David Aardsma pitched a perfect ninth for his 34th save of the season.

"They did a great job keeping the lead," Wakamatsu said. "It was really about containing the momentum. It was going back and forth, and with this team, you can't allow any room."

Although Barton's home run made it a 6-4 game and gave the opposing side a few ounces of hope, Seattle made sure Oakland's last-minute thrust didn't spill into the ninth.

After Mike Carp and Kenji Johjima -- who went 2-for-3 with a walk and notched the team's final homer of the game in the fourth -- singled to lead off the ninth, Wilson laid down a sacrifice bunt to bring runners to second and third. Ichiro Suzuki was then intentionally walked to load the bases, but the Mariners responded in a big and unusual way with a squeeze play that brought a run home on Gutierrez's sac bunt.

"We've been working on that since Spring Training," Wakamatsu said. "It was a tough situation and a big run for us."

A big run, indeed, as it capped off a win to begin the Mariners' three-team, 10-game road trip that will make final stops in Los Angeles and Texas -- two division foes ahead in the standings surely not to be very giving.

Jane Lee is a contributor for MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

Griffey open to returning to Seattle in '10

Back from knee injury, DH says reps have started talks

By Rhett Bollinger / MLB.com

09/04/09 1:47 AM ET

OAKLAND -- Ken Griffey Jr. returned to the Mariners' lineup Thursday after missing six games with inflammation in his left knee, and the slugger told the Associated Press before the Mariners' 7-4 win over the A's that he would be open to returning to Seattle next season.

"If it works out for both sides, I'm fine," Griffey, who signed a one-year contract with the Mariners in February, told the AP. "We'll figure it out at the end of the year. We've still got 30 days."

Griffey also said that his representatives have had preliminary talks with the Mariners, and another meeting would take place soon after the season ends.

He spent 11 years in Seattle, making the All-Star team in 10 of those years, before returning to the club this season. His contract for the 2009 season was for \$2 million, plus a possible \$3 million in incentives.

Griffey returned Thursday and batted in the cleanup spot as the team's designated hitter after telling manager Don Wakamatsu that his knee was feeling fine. Griffey went 0-for-4.

"He said he feels good," Wakamatsu said Thursday before the opener of a four-game set at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum. "He's had enough rest."

The 39-year-old designated hitter underwent an MRI exam on his surgically repaired knee Tuesday, and Wakamatsu felt confident everything looked normal.

Despite the bad knee, Griffey has played in 95 games this season, most in the designated hitter slot. He entered Thursday's contest batting .221 with 14 home runs and 43 RBIs. Furthermore, he ranks second on the team to Russell Branyan (58) in walks with 52, but has also struck out 60 times.

"Going back to Spring Training, coming off the knee surgery, what we set out to do was to try to keep him healthy all year," Wakamatsu said earlier in the week. "He hasn't missed a lot of time, and to kind of play back in my mind some of the big moments that he's been able to create for this team, I couldn't be happier."

The same could be said of Griffey's fellow DH buddy Mike Sweeney, who knows all too well about knee injuries, having had both of his surgically repaired.

The 36-year-old free-swinging Sweeney has been a mainstay in the lineup since Griffey's departure, getting seven starts in Seattle's past eight games. Sweeney has hit safely in nine of his past 11 games, batting .421 with a home run, five doubles and eight RBIs.

The Mariners veteran doesn't mind the day off, though.

"Sweeney was saying, 'It's about time,'" Wakamatsu said with a laugh.

Rhett Bollinger is a reporter for MLB.com. **Jane Lee** contributed to this report. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

Hall giving Mariners options

Oakland (59-75) vs. Seattle (71-64), 7:05 p.m. PT

By Jane Lee / Special to MLB.com

09/04/09 1:31 AM ET

OAKLAND -- Bill Hall may be considered a veteran in the baseball world, but the 29-year-old is far from ancient.

That much is clear when he takes the field. It's even more evident in his ability to play musical chairs with positions, which is becoming the norm these days.

Since being acquired from the Brewers on Aug. 19, Hall has played four positions with the Mariners, giving the team several lineup options with first baseman Russell Branyan on the disabled list nursing lower back pain.

"We're trying to take a look at him at different positions," manager Don Wakamatsu said Thursday. "To be able to put him in left field, right field, third base and shortstop, he's very versatile."

In the opener of a four-game series against Oakland on Thursday, Hall started the game in left field and homered in his first plate appearance. He is batting .231 and has hits in seven of 11 games since joining Seattle.

"I think his athleticism is very evident," Wakamatsu said.

When Hall and the Mariners take the field for the second matchup in Oakland on Friday, Branyan -- on the DL since Aug. 29 -- will be watching from Seattle, where he's getting treatment.

"Best-case scenario is we'll have him taking batting practice after we get back from the road trip," said Wakamatsu, whose team began a three-team, 10-game road journey Thursday. "He's feeling better already."

Pitching matchup

SEA: LHP Ryan Rowland-Smith (2-2, 3.95 ERA)

A lack of run support continues to haunt Rowland-Smith, who has experienced the feeling in his past two outings. The lefty held the Athletics to two runs over 6 1/3 innings on Aug. 25, but he settled for a no-decision,

and in his last start, a misplayed line drive led to three runs and a loss to the Royals and Zack Greinke, who pitched a one-hit shutout. Rowland-Smith threw 113 pitches -- 80 for strikes -- in a stellar, but losing, effort. Rowland-Smith is holding opponents to a .212 (7-for-33) average in the first inning. This will be the lefty's third start against the Athletics this season, and he has yet to record a decision.

OAK: RHP Clayton Mortensen (0-1, 18.00 ERA)

Acquired in the July trade that sent Matt Holliday to the Cardinals, Mortensen is making a spot start in place of rookie right-hander Vin Mazzaro, who has been temporarily shut down with shoulder tendinitis. Mortensen, a 24-year-old who has a 9-8 record with a 4.39 ERA in 23 starts at Triple-A this season, made his A's debut on Aug. 8 against the Royals and allowed eight runs on eight hits and three walks over four innings. He was sent back down after the outing.

Sea Scrolls

Endy Chavez, who underwent season-ending knee surgery June 19 after a collision that left him with what Wakamatsu called "one of the most devastating knee injuries I've ever seen," is still rehabbing in Seattle. Chavez tore two ligaments, the ACL and MCL, and is expected to miss 6-9 more months. "He's getting a lot of range of motion," Wakamatsu said. "He's now walking. ... He's surprised a lot of people with his improvement, but he's worked real hard." ... The Mariners skipper noted the only potential pitcher who has a shot at seeing a spot in the starting rotation by season's end is Brandon Morrow, who has not made a start since July 10. ... Carlos Silva, on the disabled list since May 7 with right shoulder inflammation, made his first rehab appearance by pitching one inning for Class A Everett on Tuesday. Wakamatsu said the team has two goals for the pitcher: "We want to just get him back pitching, and that will be in a relief role. And we want to get him pitching winter ball." In the meantime, Silva will make another rehab appearance -- most likely two innings -- Sunday, and will then rejoin the team in Anaheim. ... Before Thursday's game, Jack Hannahan and Mike Sweeney -- who have both spent time with the A's -- took the field early for batting practice to reunite with former teammates. "I love coming back here," Sweeney said. "These guys treated me so well."

Tickets

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Up next

- Saturday: Athletics (Brett Anderson, 7-10, 4.42) vs. Mariners (Luke French, 4-4, 4.62), 6:05 p.m. PT
- Sunday: Athletics (Gio Gonzalez, 4-5, 6.07) vs. Mariners (Doug Fister, 2-1, 2.94), 1:05 p.m. PT
- Monday: Off-day

Jane Lee is a contributor to MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

Last updated September 3, 2009 11:03 p.m. PT

Mariners get 3 two-run homers

By JANIE MCCAULEY
AP SPORTS WRITER

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Manager Don Wakamatsu stuck with Ian Snell even though the Seattle pitcher struggled to throw a strike or find a groove as his pitch count climbed.

The Mariners offense made things happen when Snell couldn't. The bullpen did its job, too.

Bill Hall, Franklin Gutierrez and Kenji Johjima each hit two-run homers to help Snell win his fourth straight start, and the Mariners beat the Oakland Athletics 7-4 Thursday night.

Johjima's fourth-inning drive gave Seattle some breathing room after the A's had pulled within a run. Seattle went ahead 4-0 after the top of the first.

"Joh's home run was a big one to take that momentum back," Wakamatsu said. "That first inning trying to defend that four-run lead, I didn't think Snell was very good."

The Mariners provided Snell (4-1) with an early cushion he couldn't protect, but he hung tough and showed why the Mariners dealt for him just before the trading deadline.

"I got a little too relaxed," said Snell, who threw 107 pitches in just five innings. "My ball was moving all over the place and I didn't feel like I could throw a strike. Wakamatsu left me in long enough to get a win. I gave my best. That's all I had in the tank tonight."

Ken Griffey Jr. returned to the Seattle lineup after missing six games with inflammation in his left knee. He went hitless in four at-bats with a strikeout and said before the game he is considering playing another season if it's the right move for both sides.

He said afterward his knee came through the game "fine."

The Mariners (71-64) matched a season high by moving seven games over .500, just the second time they've been there all year. Gutierrez also drove in a run in the ninth on a squeeze as Seattle beat the A's for the 13th time in 16 meetings.

David Aardsma pitched the ninth for his 34th save in 38 chances.

Seattle wasted no time jumping on Oakland starter Brett Tomko (3-3), who quickly fell behind against his former club.

Gutierrez homered after Ichiro Suzuki's leadoff single in the first, then Hall connected four batters later following a two-out double by Adrian Beltre.

Kurt Suzuki had a two-run single in the bottom of the first for the A's, who scored an unearned run in the second but little else until Daric Barton's solo home run in the eighth. Oakland is coming off consecutive winning series at home for just the third time this season.

"We just need to get one more big hit here or there to beat them," A's manager Bob Geren said. "Every game we've played them has been good, real close. It's just we fell short on most of them."

The Mariners won their third straight and are approaching the end of a grueling stretch - this was game No. 30 in a run of 33 in 34 days. Seattle, which brought some momentum into the season's final month, started a 10-game road trip on the heels of a 7-3 homestand that began with a three-game sweep of the A's at Safeco Field from Aug. 24-26.

Tomko lost for the first time since being called up from Triple-A Sacramento on Aug. 17, allowing six runs on eight hits in 5 2-3 innings.

"I fell behind all three guys and then when you're behind guys and don't make quality pitches and get too much of the plate, that's exactly what's going to happen," he said of the homers.

Seattle is 10-3 against the A's and has won the season series for the second time in three years. The Mariners improved to 13-6 in California in 2009.

The Mariners were to take public transportation on the BART train to and from the games for the rest of the series with the Bay Bridge connecting San Francisco and Oakland closed for work all weekend.

NOTES: Oakland on Friday will skip RHP Vin Mazzaro, who has tendinitis in his pitching shoulder. The A's plan to call up RHP Clayton Mortensen from Triple-A Sacramento. Mortensen was acquired from St. Louis as part of the Matt Holliday trade July 24. ... Suzuki, who was intentionally walked in the ninth, is 11 hits short of 200 for the year and six shy of 2,000 for his career. The star leadoff hitter returned to the lineup Tuesday after missing eight games with tightness in his left calf. "Ichiro says he feels fine, I'm not sure about 100 percent," Wakamatsu said. "I talked to him. We'll keep a dialogue going if he needs a day." ... A's backup C Landon Powell, who hit a grand slam Wednesday, is expected to get another start Sunday.

September 3, 2009

Catcher Adam Moore: Now ready for prime time?

Posted at 2:20 pm by Kirby Arnold

Everett Herald Blog

It's been a while since the Seattle Mariners' catching logjam was more dilemma than delight. They traded away minor league prospect Jeff Clement in July and seem to have found a nice balance between Rob Johnson and Kenji Johjima in the big leagues.

Now there's a third catcher who appears close to being big-league-ready, if he already isn't there -- Adam Moore.

Moore, the Mariners' sixth-round draft pick in 2006, is getting most of the catching duty for the Class AAA Tacoma Rainiers. Roger Hansen, the Mariners' catching coordinator, says Moore is ready to take the next step.

"He has gotten much more consistent at blocking, throwing and calling," Hansen said. "He's ready for the big leagues."

Moore played 27 games early this season at Class AA West Tennessee before moving up to Tacoma, where he's batting .287 with nine home runs and 40 RBI. Playing on the same Rainiers team with veteran catcher Jamie Burke certainly hasn't hurt Moore.

"But it's more a case of Adam maturing," Hansen said. "It's nice to have someone around him like Roger or (Rainiers manager Darren) Brown or Jamie, but he's handling things that he's got to recognize for himself, and that is what he's done. Adam has improved tremendously and he's ready for the big leagues."

Well, it is September, so could that mean a callup to the Mariners once Tacoma's season is over?

"That's up to (GM) Jack Zduriencik and (minor league director) Pedro Grifol, but he's ready," Hansen said.

The Mariners would need to clear roster space for Moore if they bring him up, because he's not on the 40-man. The first name you think of would be Miguel Batista just because, well, he's Miguel Batista. The Mariners also could lop off one of the minor leaguers who are on the 40-man roster, guys like pitchers Marwin Vega, Stephen Kahn or Justin Thomas.

Published: Friday, September 4, 2009

AquaSox win

Everett Herald staff

EVERETT - With the Everett AquaSox holding a one-run lead in the ninth inning and one strike away from winning, the wheels fell off.

Vancouver's Rodney Rutherford and Wilfredo Sosa each hit RBI singles in the ninth off Everett reliever Jose Rios and Vancouver defeated Everett 4-3 Thursday night at Everett Memorial Stadium in the final home game of the season for the AquaSox.

The AquaSox fell to 37-36. Today, the AquaSox begin a three-game series at Vancouver (35-38) to end the season.

Rutherford and Sosa each had two strikes, but Rios couldn't get out of the inning. Rutherford's single scored Ryan Ortiz from second to tie it 3-3, and Sosa drove in Jose Crisotomo from third base for the 4-3 advantage.

On fan appreciation night, Everett tried to send the crowd of 2,811 happy, but just couldn't pull it off.

Everett's James Jones - playing on Thursday at first base - broke a 2-2 tie in the eighth, connecting on a solo home run to right-center field. It looked like that might be the game-winner, before a disastrous ninth.

Everett left-hander Jonathan Hesketh (1-0) was impressive early. He retired the first nine Vancouver batters he faced in order, striking out six. He didn't surrender a hit until the fourth, when Tyreece House led off with a single by beating out the throw from Everett second baseman Nick Franklin.

Hesketh finished with 11 strikeouts, six hits, two runs and zero walks after being taken out in the eighth with no out.

Matthew Cerione put Everett up early, connecting on his seventh home run of the season for a 1-0 lead in the first.

Last updated September 4, 2009 5:01 a.m. PT

Martinez beats Lincecum, Phillies edge Giants 2-1

By ROB MAADDI
AP SPORTS WRITER

PHILADELPHIA -- Pedro Martinez tossed seven impressive innings to outpitch Tim Lincecum, Ryan Howard doubled in the tiebreaking run and the Philadelphia Phillies beat the San Francisco Giants 2-1 on Thursday night.

Martinez (3-0) struck out a season-high nine in his fifth start since signing with the Phillies during the All-Star break, allowing one run and five hits. He didn't walk a batter and threw just 87 pitches in his longest outing since last Aug. 21 with the New York Mets.

Jayson Werth homered for the NL East-leading Phillies, who are 16-6 since getting swept by Florida at home last month.

Eugenio Velez hit a leadoff homer for the Giants, who remained one game behind Colorado in the NL wild-card race.

The 37-year-old Martinez, plagued by injuries and inconsistency during his last three seasons with the Mets, looked like the guy who won three Cy Young Awards and was one of the most dominant pitchers of his generation.

Martinez had plenty of pop on his fastball, often reaching the low 90s on the radar gun, and mixed in an effective changeup.

He was lifted for a pinch hitter after Carlos Ruiz hit a two-out double in the seventh. Ryan Madson pitched a perfect eighth and Brad Lidge finished for his 28th save in 37 chances.

Lincecum (13-5) was the tough-luck loser for the Giants, who've scored the second-fewest runs in the NL. Lincecum struck out 11 in seven innings, allowing two runs and four hits. It was the seventh time this season the reigning NL Cy Young Award winner gave up two earned runs or less and didn't get a win.

The Phillies beat the Giants 1-0 in the series opener behind a two-hitter by Cole Hamels. Brad Penny tossed eight scoreless innings in his Giants debut, helping San Francisco win 4-0 Wednesday.

Lincecum got into trouble when he drilled Chase Utley in the back with a fastball with two outs in the sixth. Howard then ripped a liner to right-center to put the Phillies ahead 2-1.

Velez hit Martinez's first pitch into the seats in right-center for his first career leadoff homer.

Werth drove a 3-2 slider a few rows deep into the upper deck in left in the second. The All-Star outfielder became the 22nd Phillies player to hit 30 homers in a season with his 435-foot drive.

Lincecum has allowed just nine homers this season and Werth was the second right-handed hitter to connect off him.

Martinez settled in nicely after Pablo Sandoval's one-out double in the first. He retired 13 consecutive batters before Aaron Rowand singled with two outs in the fifth. Martinez fanned seven of eight batters at one point. He struck out the side in the third, firing a 91 mph fastball past Edgar Renteria to end the inning.

The Giants wasted Velez's leadoff double in the sixth. Renteria grounded out to shortstop, Sandoval bounced to second and Bengie Molina lined to center.

NOTES: Phillies RHP Brett Myers will travel with the team to Houston and expects to be activated for the series. He hasn't pitched since hip surgery in June. Myers, the team's opening-day starter the last three seasons, will pitch out of the bullpen. He had 21 saves as a closer in 2007 and could spell Lidge when necessary. "I wish him well and I'm pulling for him every night," Myers said. "If he's sore one day or he's thrown three days in a row or something, there's plenty of guys down there that can jump in that spot and do it. I don't necessarily have to be the guy that does it, but it's always fun to do." ... Howard was named NL player of the month after batting .299 with 11 homers and 33 RBIs in August.

Mets 8, Rockies 3

At Denver, David Wright drove in three runs and Pat Misch pitched seven solid innings to earn his first major league win.

Wright went 3 for 4 in his second start since coming off the 15-day disabled list after being sidelined with a concussion courtesy of a Matt Cain fastball on Aug. 15.

Wright's two-run double highlighted a four-run fifth inning off Jason Marquis (14-10).

Misch (1-1) lost a shutout when Chris Iannetta and Ian Stewart homered in the seventh.

Brewers 4, Cardinals 3

At St. Louis, Casey McGehee hit a two-run homer off John Smoltz after the Cardinals failed to turn a double play, and the Brewers avoided a three-game sweep.

Manny Parra (10-10) allowed two runs and five hits in 6 1-3 innings for Milwaukee, which has won four of six. Trevor Hoffman closed for his 30th save, striking out Albert Pujols with a runner on to end the game.

Smoltz (1-1), making his third start for the Cardinals, allowed four runs and six hits over six innings. He struck out six and walked none.

Marlins 8, Braves 3

At Miami, Hanley Ramirez hit a tying, pinch-hit single and scored the go-ahead run in his first game since teammate Dan Uggla publicly challenged his effort.

Ramirez's single in the sixth off Kris Medlen (3-5) made it 3-all. The NL batting leader easily made it to second on the play when right fielder Matt Diaz let the ball skip by him for an error, then scored on Cody Ross' double to highlight a six-run inning.

The Marlins salvaged a split in the four-game series.

Dodgers 4, Diamondbacks 2

At Los Angeles, Jon Garland, facing the team that traded him to the Dodgers just three days earlier, retired his last 14 batters and Manny Ramirez homered to lift the NL West leaders.

Garland (9-11) gave up two runs and five hits over seven innings, including a solo homer by Stephen Drew. He struck out six and walked one. The right-hander, coming off back-to-back wins against Houston - including a seven-inning scoreless stint last Saturday - has won three consecutive starts after going 1-9 with a 4.50 ERA over his previous 16 outings.

Billy Buckner (2-6) gave up four runs and eight hits in six innings and struck out four in his first start since being recalled from Triple-A Reno on Monday.

Interleague

White Sox 5, Cubs 0

At Chicago, Carlos Torres threw seven crisp innings, Dewayne Wise made a great throw to cut down a runner at the plate and the White Sox won a makeup game between the city rivals.

Torres (1-0) earned his first major league win in his third career start. He allowed five hits, walked none and struck out six.

Wise, whose highlight-reel catch preserved Mark Buehrle's perfect game back in July, made a strong throw from right field to nail Jake Fox at the plate and preserve a 1-0 lead in the seventh. Fox was trying to score from second on Jeff Baker's single.

Ryan Dempster (8-8) gave up three unearned runs and nine hits in seven-plus innings for the Cubs.

Last updated September 4, 2009 4:08 a.m. PT

Red Sox top Rays 6-3 to increase AL wild-card lead

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. -- Clay Buchholz finally beat someone other than Toronto this season, and it helped the Red Sox get a key win over Tampa Bay.

Buchholz (4-3) allowed three runs and six hits over six innings, and the AL wild-card leading Red Sox hurt Tampa Bay's playoff hopes with a 6-3 win on Thursday night.

Red Sox relievers Billy Wagner, Daniel Bard and Jonathan Papelbon, who got the final three outs for his 34th save, all pitched three hitless innings.

"That was the first thing that went through my head when Pap got that last out, that I got a win (over someone besides the Blue Jays)," Buchholz said.

Buchholz was 0-3 in six previous starts this year in non-Blue Jays games.

Things didn't start well on Thursday night. Buchholz was given a two-run lead in the first on Jason Bay's two-run double, and then let it all slip away in Tampa Bay's first at-bat.

"The way the game started, if he doesn't hold it together, we're going to that bullpen early," Boston manager Terry Francona said. "He pitches well enough to hold them down, and I thought he was pretty good."

The Red Sox won their first series at Tropicana Field since Sept. 21-23, 2007 by winning two of three. Boston dropped the defending AL champion Rays to six games back in the wild-card race. Texas is three games behind the Red Sox.

"It would have been nice to win two out of three, but it's not devastating," Rays manager Joe Maddon said. "I won't fault the effort. They outpitched us. That's just how it works sometimes."

Tampa Bay left-hander David Price, one of the stars when the Rays beat Boston in last year's AL championship series, gave up four runs and six hits in 5 1-3 innings.

"I just wasn't very good. Period," said Price, who had a win and save in the Rays AL pennant-winning series. "Didn't have command. Didn't have my stuff. I wasn't out there really mentally. When you're out there like that, you're going to lose."

Mike Lowell broke a 3-3 tie on a sixth-inning sacrifice before a run-scoring single by Victor Martinez and Kevin Youkilis' RBI grounder put Boston ahead 6-3 in the seventh. Rocco Baldelli had a second-inning solo homer.

"Nobody likes coming in here," Baldelli said. "To be able to come in here at any point and win a series is very big."

Evan Longoria had a run-scoring double during the first, which gave him 27 RBIs against the Red Sox this season. Since 1954, the most RBIs in one season against Boston is 29, set by Detroit Hall of Famer Al Kaline in 1959.

Tigers 4, Indians 3

At Detroit, Placido Polanco hit a sacrifice fly in the 10th inning and the Tigers completed a three-game sweep and increased their lead in the AL Central to five games over the idle Twins.

Ryan Raburn led off the Detroit 10th with a double. Rafael Perez (4-3) then intentionally walked Miguel Cabrera and issued an unintentional free pass to Magglio Ordonez. Polanco followed with a fly ball to center and Raburn scored standing up.

Zach Miner (6-4) pitched 2 1-3 hitless innings to get the win.

Yankees 10, Blue Jays 5

At Toronto, Jorge Posada homered and drove in four runs, Alex Rodriguez also homered and the Yankees won their seventh straight.

The AL East leaders won for the 14th time in 17 road games.

Posada's homer was his 20th, giving New York a major league-leading seven players with at least that many - the first time the Yankees have done it in team history.

Posada went 4 for 5 and hit his 340th career double, moving past Bob Meusel into ninth place on the team's all-time list.

Mariners 7, Athletics 4

At Oakland, Calif., Bill Hall, Franklin Gutierrez and Kenji Johjima each hit two-run homers to help Ian Snell (4-1) win his fourth straight start.

Johjima's fourth-inning drive gave the Mariners some breathing room after the A's had pulled within a run.

Ken Griffey Jr. returned to the Seattle lineup after missing six games with inflammation in his left knee. He went 0-for-4 with a strikeout.

Interleague

White Sox 5, Cubs 0

At Chicago, Carlos Torres threw seven crisp innings, Dewayne Wise made a great throw to cut down a runner at the plate and the White Sox won a makeup game between the city rivals.

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Wise, whose highlight-reel catch preserved Mark Buehrle's perfect game back in July, made a strong throw from right field to nail Jake Fox at the plate and preserve a 1-0 lead in the seventh. Fox was trying to score from second on Jeff Baker's single.

Ryan Dempster (8-8) gave up three unearned runs and nine hits in seven-plus innings for the Cubs.

Last updated September 4, 2009 1:11 a.m. PT

Reports: Announcer Harwell has incurable cancer

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Longtime broadcaster Ernie Harwell, who spent 42 of his 55 years as a broadcaster calling Detroit Tigers games, has been diagnosed with an incurable cancer, several media outlets reported Thursday.

The 91-year-old Harwell, who was in the Tigers' broadcast booth from 1960 until he retired in 2002, remains upbeat after an inoperable tumor was found in the area of the bile duct.

Harwell tells the Detroit Free Press: "We don't know how long this lasts. It could be a year, it could be much less than a year, much less than a half a year. Who knows? Whatever's in store, I'm ready for a new adventure. That's the way I look at it."

Harwell was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1981 and the Sportscasters and Sportswriters Hall of Fame in 1989.

Last updated September 3, 2009 4:40 p.m. PT

Janitor charged with stealing Phillies' \$15K ring

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHILADELPHIA -- A janitor at the Philadelphia Phillies' ballpark has been charged with stealing a diamond-laden World Series ring left by an executive in a park restroom.

The janitor works for a subcontractor that cleans Citizens Bank Park. He faces charges of theft and receiving stolen property.

A team marketing executive had removed the ring Monday, when the team was off. The ring was gone when he went back a half-hour later.

Police Capt. Laurence Nodiff (NOH'-dif) says surveillance tapes led them to the janitor and they found the ring wrapped in a paper towel in his supply closet.

The ring is a keepsake from last year's championship won versus the Tampa Bay Rays. It has 103 diamonds and is worth about \$15,000.

Last updated September 3, 2009 2:41 p.m. PT

Ex-Mets pitcher gets 6 months for tax evasion

By TODD RICHMOND

ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

MADISON, Wis. -- A federal judge on Thursday sentenced former major league pitcher Jerry Koosman to six months in prison for not paying his taxes.

Prosecutors say Koosman, a former All-Star who helped the New York Mets win the 1969 World Series, didn't pay federal income taxes for 2002, 2003 and 2004. He pleaded guilty in May to willfully failing to file taxes for 2002, a misdemeanor, in a deal with prosecutors.

U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb found that Koosman cost the government as much as \$80,000. She could have sentenced him to a full year in prison but chose to cut that in half and add a year of supervised release, during which probation agents will closely monitor his finances.

Prosecutors say Koosman has filed returns for the missing years but still owes the government about \$65,000.

The judge scolded Koosman for taking advantage of all the opportunities the United States offered him, including the chance to play major league baseball and win a World Series, then walking away without paying.

"It is a serious blemish on an otherwise outstanding life," Crabb told Koosman.

Koosman, 66, of Osceola, told IRS agents in 2006 that he had researched federal tax laws and concluded they applied only to federal employees, corporate workers and District of Columbia residents. During a May hearing, he told Crabb he was naive and fell in with the anti-tax movement.

His attorney, Robert Bernhoft, argued that Koosman deserved probation, pointing to letters to the judge that described him as an honest, reliable, naive farm boy. Koosman put his professional baseball career on hold to serve in the military, has performed too many charitable acts to list and never looked down on people of "lower station" even though professional athletes often act aloof and arrogant, Bernhoft added.

"He has a reputation for being too trusting and naive," the attorney said.

Koosman, now silver-haired but still tall with an athlete's build, read a statement apologizing for his actions.

"I tend to trust people more than I should," he said. "I shouldn't have listened to those people about tax returns."

Assistant U.S. Attorney John Vaudreuil (pronounced VOH'-drey) countered that the case wasn't about Koosman being a bad person but about sending a message to the anti-tax community.

"If you flub the tax laws and if you willfully fail to file taxes, it comes with a price," he said.

Crabb told Koosman she couldn't believe that even a naive person would think he didn't have to pay taxes.

Koosman played 19 seasons in the majors, including his first 12 with the Mets. He had a career record of 222-209 with a 3.36 ERA.

He and Tom Seaver were the backbone of the 1969 Mets' starting rotation. That team, nicknamed the "Amazin' Mets," overtook the division-leading Chicago Cubs in the final month of the regular season to win the National League title and went on to win the World Series.

Koosman won two Series games that year. He gave up a run and two hits in 8 2-3 innings in Game 2 and three runs in a complete-game performance in Game 5 to clinch the series victory over the Baltimore Orioles.

He also won a game in the 1973 World Series, but the Mets lost the title to Oakland.

The Mets traded Koosman to the Minnesota Twins after the 1978 season, and he played the final seven seasons of his career with the Twins, Chicago White Sox and Philadelphia Phillies. He gave up Pete Rose's landmark 4,000th career hit in 1984 and retired after the 1985 season.

Crabb told Koosman to report to prison on Nov. 3. Koosman told reporters after the proceeding that he was sorry and had learned a lesson.

"Pay your taxes," he said. "I'm looking forward to doing that and getting on with the rest of my life."