

A's News Clips, Tuesday, September 8, 2009

A's Rajai Davis runs like rabbit, and more

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Rajai Davis once was the type of player you planned a trip to the concession stand around. Now, you think twice.

He's become equal parts run-producer, base-stealer and Energizer Bunny for the A's.

His speed always has made for excitement. But as Davis' game has become more well-rounded, he's evolved from useful part-time player into the A's everyday center fielder.

"He earned all of his playing time," manager Bob Geren said. "He got a chance to play and he did so well that you didn't want to take him out of the lineup. That's what you're looking for, a player to create their own playing time, and he did it."

The A's, who begin an eight-game road trip tonight against the Chicago White Sox, have turned their eyes toward 2010. Davis has forced his way into their plans.

In 46 games since the All-Star break, he's batting .327 (54-for-165) with 28 runs, 14 doubles and 28 RBI. His 20 stolen bases since the break were tied for the major league lead entering Monday.

With 31 stolen bases overall, Davis is the first Athletic to swipe more than 30 since Rickey Henderson in 1998.

Yet what exactly do the A's have in Davis? A player simply riding an extended hot streak? Or a late bloomer who's just now starting to flourish six weeks shy of his 29th birthday?

"He's playing a lot better than I expected," one major league scout said. "He looked like a one-tool guy, and he's turned out to be more than that."

The A's consider Davis, who's arbitration eligible for the first time this winter, a sure part of their outfield picture next season. They stop short of saying he's entrenched as their starting center fielder.

But if the A's carry over into 2010 their newfound fondness for the running game — they are fifth in the majors with 107 stolen bases — Davis blends nicely with that philosophy.

"He's taken advantage of this opportunity," assistant general manager David Forst said. "It certainly changes what we think he's capable of going forward. And our opinion beforehand wasn't necessarily through any fault of his own, because he never really got the opportunity."

"I don't think we have a clear enough picture of next year's team to know where he fits, but he certainly has a role here, and he's proven that role is more than just as a pinch runner."

The A's still refer to Davis as a young player, but in terms of experience more than age. He was drafted out of a Connecticut junior college in 2001 by the Pittsburgh Pirates. When the A's claimed him off waivers from the Giants in April 2008, Davis had played just 107 games from 2006-08.

Now enjoying regular playing time, Davis said there's no substitute for experience.

"I've been able to make adjustments from game to game," he said. "I feel like I can slow the pitches down. I'm getting a better understanding of pitchers, and how they like to operate. I've learned that by playing. It's not something I could have learned on the bench. It's a feel."

Two scouts said they've been impressed with Davis' development. But they still consider him best suited as a fourth outfielder, saying he needs to shorten up his swing and show more plate discipline.

Davis is simply pleased to see his name in the lineup every day. And he's making the most of it.

"I'm just thankful for getting an opportunity, to help us not only win but prepare for the future," he said. "What that may be, I'm not sure right now."

A's notebook: Change in Gio Gonzalez has A's encouraged by his outing

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Change in Gonzalez has A's encouraged by outing

Gio Gonzalez pitched a career-high seven innings Sunday, and the manner in which he did it throughout a 5-2 victory over the Seattle Mariners has the A's encouraged.

Gonzalez made effective use of his changeup, a pitch that Gonzalez has worked hard to master because it gives him a solid third option to complement a fastball and curve.

After allowing a run in the first, Gonzalez stranded runners at first and second by coaxing a 6-4-3 double play on a changeup he threw Adrian Beltre. Gonzalez allowed another run in the sixth, and when Scott Hairston put the A's ahead with a grand slam in the seventh, Gonzalez (5-5) was in line for his first victory since Aug. 10.

The changeup "came through," Gonzalez said. "We let them know I have a third pitch in my back pocket."

Instead of racking up big strikeout numbers — and the walks to go with it — as in recent starts, Gonzalez was more efficient. He got two double-play grounders. He struck out three, walked two, and credited his defense and the pitch-calling of catcher Landon Powell.

"He's becoming a complete pitcher and doing everything he can do to stay in the rotation," Powell said.

A's owner Lew Wolff has been approached by a Phoenix-area developer to relocate the A's spring training headquarters from Phoenix Municipal Stadium to the Salt River Reservation east of Scottsdale, according to a story in Saturday's Arizona Republic.

But Wolff said in a statement through a team spokesperson that the A's are committed to Phoenix Muni, the A's spring training home since 1984. Phoenix Muni's capacity of 7,881 is among the smallest in the Cactus League.

Plans are under way to renovate not only Phoenix Muni but also the team's Papago Park minor league complex.

"It's a nonissue," Wolff said. "We are committed to work with the city and (Phoenix Mayor Phil) Gordon to renovate both Phoenix Municipal Stadium and our Papago training facilities. We are just starting discussions and have several years to work out a mutually agreeable program."

The A's split their four-game series with Seattle and are 5-11 against the Mariners this season. They're 16-25 against the AL West overall. The A's begin an eight-game road trip Tuesday with a two-game series against the Chicago White Sox.

The rotation remains unsettled because of the unknown return date of Vin Mazzaro from shoulder tendinitis. Brett Tomko and Trevor Cahill will start in Chicago. After a day off Thursday, Clayton Mortensen and Brett Anderson will start the first two games in Minnesota, with Gonzalez tentatively set for the third game.

Hairston's slam lifts A's over Mariners

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The A's acquired Scott Hairston to help solidify the middle of their lineup, and he was steamed at himself for popping up with the bases loaded in the fifth inning Sunday.

Good thing he received a chance for redemption.

Presented another bases-loaded opportunity two innings later, Hairston delivered a grand slam that propelled the A's to a 5-2 victory over the Seattle Mariners to close out a seven-game homestand on a high note.

Hairston, obtained in a July 5 trade from San Diego in exchange for pitchers Sean Gallagher, Craig Italiano and Ryan Webb, was mired in an 8-for-58 slump before the first slam of his career, a blast to left on an 0-1 slider from Seattle reliever Shawn Kelley (4-2).

"I think it came at a great time," Hairston said. "Having that ball go out was a big lift off my shoulders. The ball I popped up, that got under my skin a little bit."

He wasn't the only one kicking himself. The A's were 0-for-7 with runners in scoring position before he came through.

The turnaround made a deserving winner of left-hander Gio Gonzalez (5-5), who held Seattle to two runs over seven innings. It also upstaged Mariners star Ichiro Suzuki, who collected the 2,000th hit of his major league career with a double to lead off the game.

A's closer Andrew Bailey came on in the ninth and notched his 23rd save, tying Huston Street's Oakland record for saves by a rookie.

But the day belonged to Hairston, 29, a player the A's expect significant contributions from in the future. He isn't eligible for free agency until 2012, and the A's think his combination of power and speed can help anchor the offense moving forward.

Hairston's slam was his 17th home run, tying his career high. Although he was hitting .299 with the Padres at the time of the trade, Hairston entered the day hitting just .235 in nearly an equal number of at-bats with the A's.

A's manager Bob Geren said he thinks Hairston will continue to improve with regular playing time. He made his major league debut in 2004, but this is the first season he's on pace to play more than 112 games.

"He's been struggling lately, but I can't think of anybody I've ever seen with a shorter swing than him," Geren said. "Guys who have a short swing can wait longer to see if they want to swing. Now he's getting his opportunity. San Diego gave it to him earlier this year. Now we're giving it to him here."

Suzuki lashed the game's second pitch for a double, becoming the second-fastest player in major league history to get 2,000 hits. Al Simmons got there in 1,390 games; Suzuki took 1,402.

The A's did surprisingly little to draw attention to the feat. But Suzuki got a standing ovation from the crowd of 16,188, removing his helmet to acknowledge it.

He also collected 1,278 hits in Japan before signing with Seattle in 2001.

"Me and the umpire were joking," A's catcher Landon Powell said. "He runs and then hits the ball. He's the only guy in baseball who does that. It makes you wonder, 'Are we all doing it wrong? Is he right?' He can hit any pitch in any zone, and you just have to try and get him out."

Powell, who spelled Kurt Suzuki, continues to produce when he plays. He ripped a solo homer in the fourth that tied the game 1-1, giving him four homers and 10 RBI in his past seven games.

Oakland's future seems bright

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Two years ago, A's general manager Billy Beane first talked about the A's need to rebuild. The cupboard was bare in the minors, the big-league team was bleeding free agents and coping with numerous injuries. Measures had to be taken.

Then, when the club acquired four name players last winter - Matt Holliday, Jason Giambi, Orlando Cabrera and Nomar Garciaparra - there was a sense that the team was trying to make a move in just Year 2 of the rebuild.

That did not happen. More injuries, plus underperformance from several of the new players, sunk the A's chances early. Holliday and Cabrera were traded, Giambi released.

The focus is back on rebuilding. So where do things stand?

Since Beane first discussed a makeover, the A's have traded several major contributors: Dan Haren, Rich Harden and Chad Gaudin, Joe Blanton, Nick Swisher, Mark Kotsay, Marco Scutaro, Holliday and Cabrera.

They've received 24 players in return and traded three: Outfielder Carlos Gonzalez and left-hander Greg Smith (both from the Haren trade) went with closer Huston Street to get Holliday. Right-hander Sean Gallagher, from the Harden deal, went to San Diego as part of the trade that brought Scott Hairston.

'An impressive haul'

Half of the 24 have been pitchers, including current starters Brett Anderson (Haren deal) and Gio Gonzalez (Swisher deal) and injured closer Joey Devine (Kotsay deal). Thirteen of the 24 have played in Oakland at some point (some only briefly), six are currently in Oakland and two are on the disabled list.

"It's an impressive haul," said Baseball Prospectus analyst Kevin Goldstein. "It's one of the best collections of talent in baseball right now. They made some mistakes in deceiving themselves (that) they had a chance to do something this year rather than just fully committing to the rebuild, but all signs point to up."

Add that to Oakland's highly rated recent draft and some standout international signings, such as right-hander Michael Ynoa, and the A's future appears bright despite their last-place standing.

"Young, affordable pitching is hard to get, but Billy is doing it," Padres general manager Kevin Towers said. "There's a premium on good young starting pitching, and he's getting it with trades. He's finding it internationally."

International relations

Yankees general manager Brian Cashman pointed to the Ynoa signing as an indication that Beane was serious when he said two years ago that the team would redouble its international efforts.

"Listen, I wanted Ynoa and they outbid us," he said by phone Monday. "The Oakland A's have become a big player in the international market."

Colorado general manager Dan O'Dowd, who sent Holliday to the A's in exchange for Carlos Gonzalez, Street and Smith, said that Beane got "very good value" for Holliday when the GM moved him to St. Louis for three players, including minor-league third baseman Brett Wallace.

"I don't think they're far away from being a real good club," O'Dowd said. "All those young pitchers they have are learning on the job and they'll be so much better for it."

Trade upgrade

Goldstein said that if you took the A's original package for Holliday, including the outfielder Gonzalez, and swapped it for Wallace, right-hander Clayton Mortensen and outfielder Shane Peterson, "you'd end up with a slight upgrade."

ESPN.com analyst Keith Law is particularly enamored with Wallace, saying he has a "man crush" on him because he can hit left-handers as well as right-handers. Goldstein said that infielder Adrian Cardenas (Blanton deal) could "hit .300 in his sleep."

Nearly all of the A's opponents this year have raved about Anderson, and Goldstein called him a future All-Star. Another rookie starter, Trevor Cahill, was drafted and developed by Oakland, as was Vin Mazzaro; with those three, the A's have the makings of a good rotation. Closer Andrew Bailey, also homegrown, might be the AL Rookie of the Year.

"Cahill and Anderson can fit into the top half of even a very good rotation," Law said. "And they hit on Andrew Bailey - who knew? I saw him in college (at Wagner) and if you'd told me he'd be an All-Star, I would have laughed at you."

Questions remain

There remain some question marks when it comes to position players. Goldstein and Law noted that several of Oakland's top prospects, including Wallace, Cardenas and power-hitting Chris Carter (Haren deal) don't necessarily have ideal spots on the diamond. Even Grant Green, the A's top pick in June, might be a candidate for a position change; many believe he'd be a better outfielder than a shortstop.

"And this is a team that cares about defense," Law said. "There's no third base or shortstop option I know of."

The rebuild did not pay off immediately this year, but according to Cashman, Beane's aggressiveness in acquiring top young talent will accelerate the process.

"Billy is all in," Cashman said. "He's never going to be caught in no-man's land. Either he's going to completely rebuild or he's finishing something off for the final push. He's not sitting on his hands saying, 'We need to have just a respectable season.'"

"If they stay status quo, you're looking at regression; the future would not be as bright. But if these guys stay healthy and continue to develop, you'll see the fruits of the labor. Fast forward a year and the picture will look so much better."

Changeup unleashed

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Gio Gonzalez needed a third pitch to go with his fastball and curveball. So he has been honing his changeup, using what he calls a "secret" grip, and Sunday, he used it to great effect in a big situation.

With one run in and two men on base in the first against Seattle, Gonzalez got Adrian Beltre to ground into an inning-ending double play on a changeup.

"It came through," Gonzalez said of the pitch. "I wanted to let teams know I have a third pitch. I don't want them to keep guessing with two pitches."

By getting more outs than usual through contact rather than strikeouts, Gonzalez (5-5) was able to go a career-high seven innings and said, "I'm going to go celebrate. ... I'm super excited that I got through the seventh."

Staying put: According to the Arizona Republic, a developer in Scottsdale, Ariz., sent a letter to A's owner Lew Wolff hoping to persuade the team to move its spring games to a stadium (not yet built) on the Salt River Reservation in east Scottsdale.

"It's a non-issue," Wolff said through a spokesman. "We are committed to work with the city of Phoenix ... to renovate both Phoenix Municipal Stadium and our Papago Park training facilities. We are just starting discussions and have several more years" to reach a deal.

Briefly: Andrew Bailey recorded his 23rd save, tying Huston Street's Oakland rookie record set in 2005. ... Vin Mazzaro (shoulder) will throw Wednesday in Chicago and could be worked back into the rotation the following week.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Nearly out: The A's are 20 1/2 games out of first place in the AL West and their "tragic" number for elimination from the division is six. Their number for elimination from the wild-card race is eight.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Dealing: Paul Smyth, a right-handed reliever taken in the 35th round in June, did not allow a run in 29 1/3 innings at short-season Vancouver. Promoted to Class-A Kane County, he hasn't allowed a run in six innings.

Wallace won't be alone as he matures

Top prospect's favorite player, Chavez, happy to mentor

By Adam Loberstein / MLB.com

SACRAMENTO -- For Brett Wallace, it was simply what his family did.

Whenever the Oakland A's were on TV, everyone would gather around and watch. Wallace began playing traveling baseball at age 12, making the unwritten family requirement a little more difficult to meet. He'd always try to make it home in time to see the first pitch, though.

On those occasions when the whole family happened to be in town for the weekend, young Wallace would hop in the car with his folks, make the hourlong drive south from Sonoma, Calif., to the Coliseum and see the team he grew up rooting for in person.

"When we were at home," Wallace said, "we watched every game. When you're a fan of the team, you're going to make sure you check out how they're doing. I always made time."

Wallace paused. He tried to hold back the smile coming across his now 23-year-old face, then let himself finish his thought.

"Yeah, I got the chance to see him play a lot," Wallace added, now grinning widely.

He would be Eric Chavez, who's been Wallace's favorite player since he made his Major League debut in 1998 -- the same year Wallace started traveling to play baseball year-round.

Chavez is a six-time Gold Glove winner, good for fourth most all time among third basemen. The problem is Chavez, who signed a six-year, \$66 million extension in 2004, hasn't been healthy in a few years, having played only 31 games over the past two seasons.

Wallace, meanwhile, is regarded as one of the top hitting prospects in the Minor Leagues. He's supposed to one day give his favorite team a much-needed power boost in the heart of its order.

That's not all. He's supposed to follow in his favorite player's footsteps, too.

Spring dreaming

It's June 5, 2008, the day some team is expected to take Wallace with its first-round pick in the First-Year Player Draft.

Wallace, who starred at Arizona State University, knew there was a good chance the A's would take him with the No. 12 pick. He knew they could use a power-hitting corner infielder. He knew he was projected to go in that range.

Oakland took Jemile Weeks, though. Wallace went to St. Louis with the next pick.

Thirteen months later, the A's brought Wallace home, acquiring him as the centerpiece of the Matt Holliday trade.

"That's a nice little caveat to the deal," said A's general manager Billy Beane shortly after trading for Wallace. "Brett was very, very excited about it. It was probably a year too late getting him over here, but we're very excited we have him."

Sure, Wallace was excited about coming back to his native Northern California. The opportunity to don the green and gold one day? That was great, too.

The first thing to go through Wallace's head after the trade, though, was that he'd get to work alongside Chavez at Spring Training come February.

"My dream would be to go out there during Spring Training and be on the field with him and learn from him," Wallace said. "I'm not here to replace someone like him. I'm here to learn everything I can from him."

Chavez, who underwent season-ending back surgery in June, is doing everything he can to get into a position to tutor Wallace.

Chavez is used to going through therapy. That's what happens when you've had five surgeries in two years. You go through it and start feeling better -- at times, you even start feeling good.

He's still six months away from Spring Training, too. The 31-year-old is rehabbing two or three times a week, rather than the four or five therapy sessions he put himself through per week in the past, hoping time will be his equalizer.

The biggest change, though, is Chavez has tempered his expectations this time around.

"I feel like I'm making progress," Chavez said, "but I'd be reluctant to say I'm feeling 100 percent and everything is going to be well come Spring Training. I'm a little bit more realistic about what to expect. ... This has all been a pretty traumatic experience for my body to go through."

That's not the hard part. The toughest thing, Chavez said, is realizing his window to play the game he's loved his whole life is quickly closing.

Chavez hopes his body cooperates enough to allow him to play another three years, even if his ailing right shoulder limits him to first base and designated-hitter duties.

"When you're 20 years old," Chavez said, "you're not really thinking, 'OK, fine, my career is coming to an end.' If I get out there next year and it doesn't go well, the next time I step on the field could be my last. ... That's something that's really hard to deal with."

Passing the game along

Chavez can put himself in Wallace's shoes.

He remembers playing Wiffle Ball with his brothers growing up, pretending they were Rickey Henderson, Jose Canseco or Tony Gwynn.

Wallace pretended he was Chavez. Both were third basemen. Both hit left-handed. Chavez had a big leg kick at the plate, though. Wallace didn't. No worries. He developed a Chavez-esque kick by the time he got to high school.

"That lets me know how old I've got," Chavez joked.

"To be honest with you," Wallace said, "I'm sure his leg kick had something to do with mine. You just saw him come up, do the things he was doing at such a young age -- he became the cornerstone of the A's. He was just someone I took to right away."

His favorite player is looking forward to taking to him.

When Chavez first got to the big leagues, he quickly began modeling himself after Jason Giambi. He recalls the way Giambi went about his business, the way he played the game, the way he passed on the game -- that's the kind of player Chavez wanted to be.

Chavez certainly went about his business, playing the game to an average of 28 home runs and 94 RBIs per season from 2000-06.

Now, his focus is on emulating the third thing Giambi did so well: passing his knowledge along. Chavez is looking forward to making an impact in Wallace's life, whether it's on the field or off it.

"I do. I really relish being able to pass things along," Chavez said. "To come full circle, it's pretty crazy to think about."

And Wallace? Yeah, his thoughts exactly.

"It's crazy to even think about it," Wallace said. "I think the biggest thing is that everyone hopes he can get healthy and come back and have a big year like everyone knows he can."

"With someone as established as him, you really just want to earn their respect. You want to go in there and let him know you're not just one of those young kids that's coming up thinking he's the greatest. I just want to come in, work hard and hopefully earn his respect. Hopefully from there, we can work together and he can help me."

Wallace's work ethic has already caught Chavez's eye.

"I'd love to work with him, especially hearing that he wants to be as good as he can be," Chavez said. "That's definitely somebody that I'd like to work with."

Getting defensive

Wallace has always done his best work at the plate. He's batting .303 with 11 doubles, seven homers and 27 RBIs in 43 games with Triple-A Sacramento.

He does, however, have his share of defensive critics.

"Let's face it," Beane said. "His bat is the attraction."

Simply put, Wallace just doesn't look like a third baseman. His massive lower body screams first base or DH a lot louder than hot corner.

Wallace has shown soft hands at the position, though, and has made it clear that he's not only willing to put in the time necessary to be a big league third baseman, but that he wants to.

"Scouts are great and all," Wallace said, "but they're not going to predict the future 100 percent of the time. I think what they can't measure is how hard you're going to work and how focused you'll be at that position."

That's where Chavez comes in.

Chavez wasn't born a great third baseman. Far from it. In fact, he almost wasn't a third baseman at all.

"I was told pretty early -- before I even played professional baseball -- that I would never be able to play third," said Chavez, who made 32 errors as a first-year pro with high Class A Visalia.

Chavez cut that number down to 21 the following season, then nine during his rookie year with the A's.

Chavez put in the time, and Wallace watched from afar.

"In his case, he worked probably as hard as anyone has every worked," Wallace said. "I've heard all the stories about him going out and taking early ground balls, late ground balls -- just working on things. When you're willing to put in that time, no one can predict what you're going to do.

"I'm not saying I'm going to go out there and win 10 Gold Gloves and be the best ever, but my goal is that I'm going to play third base. As long as they want me there, I'm going to work my butt off so there's never a reason to move me from third."

Chavez has never seen Wallace man third, but he doesn't need to. Not yet, at least.

"Without even seeing him, I already know tips that instantly could make him a better infielder," Chavez said. "I used to be where Brett is now. ... There's no doubt that if we get the opportunity to work together, he's automatically going to be a better third baseman."

That all sounds great to Wallace. He has something he wants to say first, though.

"The first thing would be to go in there, shake his hand and tell him I've been a fan of him my whole life," Wallace said. "Maybe, we can start a friendship there."

"Hopefully, Brett and I get a lot of time together," Chavez said. "Maybe he'll be able to learn something from me that'll help him be a good player in this league for a long time."

Hairston's slam lifts A's to win in finale

Clutch shot secures fifth win of the year for Gonzalez

By Jayson Addcox / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Starting pitcher Gio Gonzalez did something on Sunday that he hadn't done all season. And he was glowing after the game.

The A's 5-2 victory over the Mariners was great and the dramatic fashion in which the A's took the lead was even better, but for Gonzalez, seven innings of work was awesome. In 12 starts this season, Gonzalez has been one out from completing seven innings twice, but both times he was unable to do it.

On Sunday the lefty shined, allowing two runs on six hits while striking out three to earn his fifth win of the season. Gonzalez used a steady diet of curveballs and fastballs to go with a new four-seam changeup that he recently added to his repertoire.

"I'm going to go out and celebrate," said Gonzalez jokingly after the game. "It's exciting. I told [pitching coach] Curt Young that I was super excited about today. I finally got through the seventh inning and I battled through it."

The game didn't start out exactly the way Gonzalez wanted it to. He gave up a lead off double to Ichiro Suzuki, who recorded his 2,000th career hit on the double, and then after a sacrifice bunt, he gave up an RBI single to Jose Lopez.

The youngster kept his composure in the inning and was rewarded when he induced an inning-ending double play to get of the first-inning jam.

"I was very clueless to what happened," said Gonzalez of Ichiro's 2,000th hit in the first inning. "Ichiro, congratulations, my hat is off to you. I respect him as a hitter, but I was just glad how it went after that."

With Gonzalez on the mound keeping the A's in the game, the offense spurted through the first six innings. Landon Powell tied the game in the fourth inning when he hammered a fastball over the right-field fence for his sixth homer of the season.

Powell, who was behind the plate in place of Kurt Suzuki, was impressed with Gonzalez's performance and was glad to get the A's on the board.

"That's what the game is all about when you can't get hits with men on base and clear runs across the board," Powell said. "He [Gonzalez] is getting better every start. He's pounding the zone throwing the fastball early in the count and using the curveball. He's really been working on the changeup and he threw that well today."

With the Mariners up 2-1 in the seventh inning, designated hitter Scott Hairston put his mark on the game adding some dramatics with his first career grand slam. Hairston, who popped up with the bases loaded in the fifth, got a chance to redeem himself and didn't let it get away.

Hairston drilled an 0-1 offering from reliever Shawn Kelley over the fence in left field to put the A's ahead for good.

"It came at a great time in the game and in my career," Hairston said. "The popup in the fifth got under my skin a little, so it was a big lift off of my shoulders."

The A's then turned to their solid bullpen. Reliever Brad Ziegler pitched a perfect eighth inning, and then the A's handed the ball to rookie sensation Andrew Bailey.

Bailey did exactly what he has done for most of the season. The closer shut the door on the Mariners to earn his 23rd save of the season. Bailey, who has now converted 18 consecutive saves, tied Huston Street (2005) for most consecutive saves by an Oakland rookie.

"He's similar to [Huston] Street in the way he started that year. He wasn't the closer and due to whatever reason he became the closer. Very similar," manager Bob Geren said. "Hopefully he will take the same footsteps and become the Rookie of the Year. He's very deserving."

After day off, Suzuki to continue grinding

Oakland (61-76) at Chicago (69-70), 5:11 p.m. PT

By Jayson Addcox / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A's manager Bob Geren gave starting catcher Kurt Suzuki the day off on Sunday in order to keep him fresh for the upcoming series against the White Sox in Chicago.

Suzuki has played in 124 games this season, and caught in 115 of those. With reserve catcher Landon Powell showing some power at the plate, Geren has had the flexibility to give Suzuki an occasional day off.

According to Geren, Suzuki will be back behind the plate on Tuesday. Suzuki, who caught 141 games last season after only catching 68 in 2007, said the grind of catching over 130 games can catch up with player.

"In my first season when I got called up, I had caught 50 games in Triple-A and then 60 in the Majors and I was gassed," Suzuki said. "Last year I caught in 140 games and I could really feel it. It's a big transition and every year you get stronger and more accustomed to it."

Suzuki has been one of the A's most consistent hitters this season, hitting .271 with 11 homers and 66 RBIs. In just his second full season in the Majors, Suzuki leads the A's in RBIs, hits (131), and doubles (30).

If statistics are any indication of fatigue, Suzuki batted just .240 in August after hitting .294 in July. According to the catcher, the bat gets a little heavier at the end of the season.

"Once you get close to that 120th game, your bat gets a little heavier, the pitchers seem to be throwing a little harder and you miss some pitches that you would've hit in May or June," Suzuki said. "Sometimes I feel like I'm swinging a metal rod up there."

But make no mistake about it, Suzuki is no slouch. The catcher said he's looking forward to grinding it out and finishing strong. According to Suzuki, the end of the season is the best time to show what you're made of as a player.

"If I can go out there even when I'm tired and be productive then that's a sign of being mentally tough," Suzuki said. "The way I look at it is you have to be a gamer."

Pitching matchup

OAK: RHP Brett Tomko (3-3, 4.40 ERA)

After making three strong starts following his promotion from Triple-A Sacramento, Tomko struggled for the first time with Oakland his last time out, vs. Seattle on Thursday, and the long ball was his primary nemesis. He gave up a pair of two-run homers in the first inning and another two-run shot in the fourth on the way to a loss at the hands of the Mariners. Tomko, who gave up six runs on eight hits -- five for extra bases -- while walking one and striking out two. Released by the Yankees before being picked up by the A's, Tomko has not faced the White Sox this season.



CWS: RHP Carlos Torres (1-0, 3.86 ERA)

After the rookie's stellar effort against the Cubs on Thursday, Ozzie Guillen said Torres deserved another start. But the White Sox are waiting to see how they perform against the Red Sox in a four-game home set and if Detroit slips at all to decide if they want to give younger hurlers such as Torres and Dan Hudson an extended look. Torres threw seven scoreless innings against the Cubs, giving up just five hits and striking out six. Most importantly, Torres didn't issue a walk after giving up nine free passes in his previous 9 1/3 innings of big league baseball.

Tidbits

Starting pitcher Vin Mazzaro, who missed his scheduled start on Friday with shoulder tendinitis, is tentatively scheduled to throw a bullpen next Saturday. ... Closer Andrew Bailey, who was named the American League Rookie of the Month for August, has converted 18 consecutive save opportunities. That ties him for most by a rookie since Huston Street converted 18 in a row in 2005.

Up next

- Wednesday: Athletics (Trevor Cahill, 8-12, 4.66) at White Sox (Freddy Garcia, 1-2, 4.76), 5:11 p.m. PT 
- Thursday: Off-day
- Friday: Athletics (Clayton Mortensen, 0-2, 9.00) at Twins (Scott Baker, 13-7, 4.34), 5:10 p.m. PT 

A's staff grinding toward season's end

Geren works youngsters within organization's guidelines

By Jayson Addcox / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- As the dog days of summer come to a grueling end in September, the A's young pitching staff is starting to feel the fatigue of a long season set in.

Starting pitcher Vin Mazzaro was scratched from his scheduled start on Friday with shoulder tendinitis, and Brett Anderson and Trevor Cahill are closing in on 175 innings pitched. According to A's manager Bob Geren, the staff is on pace with the organization's guideline for easing in Minor League pitchers.

"The only guys that are on track to have an increase in their innings are Anderson and Cahill. That's why I've moved the rotation around and added a sixth starter," Geren said. "I've tried to limit their innings as much as possible in order to stay within the guideline that we've had here for the last 10 years. We try to keep them within a 20 percent increase in innings from one year to the next."

Anderson pitched a total of 105 innings last season and Cahill threw 124 1/3 innings both with Class A Stockton and Double-A Midland. This season, both starters are on pace to throw 175 innings.

According to catcher Kurt Suzuki, who has caught the majority the A's games this season and last season, the grind of a 162-game season is noticeable in September, especially with the young pitchers.

Suzuki said he has noticed a drop in velocity with some of the young guys, but has also noticed them get tougher and grind harder as the season has progressed.

"I had the opportunity to catch some young guys in the last two seasons and you can notice a minor drop in velocity and command," Suzuki said. "It's hard to go from throwing 120 innings in the Minors to close to 200 innings in the big leagues. These guys are tough, they're grinding it out like the rest of us are."

Mazzaro, who was recently scratched from his scheduled start on Friday, said he needs to work hard in the offseason to prepare himself for a full season in the Majors.

"I've pitched more innings in the past than I have this season, but I know that a full season in the Majors creates a lot of wear and tear on a pitcher's arm," Mazzaro said. "I'm setting goals right now for the offseason in order to get ready to pitch into September next year and hopefully the playoffs."

Geren said former A's pitcher Joe Blanton is a perfect example of how the A's organization makes the transition from the Minors to the Majors easier on their young guys. He said Blanton, who is on pace to pitch 200 innings for the second straight season for the Philadelphia Phillies, followed the same guidelines that Cahill, Anderson and the rest of the A's staff is following.

As the season comes to and end in September, Suzuki said the grind affects everyone on the team.

"It's a learning process and a transition for the younger guys, but it teaches you to be mentally tough," Suzuki said. "I still feel the wear and tear when I get to September. The bat gets a little heavier and your body doesn't recover as well. It's physically and mentally grinding, but that's what makes it fun. You have to learn to grind it out and battle everyday."

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Cats win, will face Tacoma in playoffs

rivercats.com

With a resounding and relieving 10-4 victory over the Salt Lake Bees on Monday afternoon, the Sacramento River Cats now turn their focus to the Tacoma Rainiers.

Tacoma finished an improbable comeback in the Pacific Coast League North Division race, rallying from 7.5 games back entering August 22 to clinch a playoff berth Monday with a victory over the Colorado Springs Sky Sox.

Colorado Springs went 5-11 since August 22 while Tacoma went 13-4 to catch the Sky Sox and host the River Cats in Game 1 of the PCL playoffs' first round Wednesday night. The Rainiers capped the comeback with a convincing 11-2 victory Monday night, finishing off a 3-1 series victory over the Sky Sox.

Games 1 and 2 of the first-round series between Sacramento and Tacoma will be played Wednesday and Thursday in Tacoma, both at 7 p.m. Games 3 (Friday, 7:05 p.m.), 4 (Saturday, 7:05 p.m.) and 5 (Sunday, 1:05 p.m.) will be held at Raley Field.

The match-up will be a rematch of the two teams' 2005 playoff series, which Tacoma won 3-games-to-1 and marks the last playoff series the River Cats lost. The winner of the first-round series between Sacramento and Tacoma will face the winner of the American Conference Championship Series between the Memphis Redbirds and the Albuquerque Isotopes, also set to begin Wednesday.

Sacramento won the season series against Tacoma, 9-7; the River Cats were 7-8 this season against Colorado Springs.

Having lost their previous six games, Sacramento needed a victory Monday to avoid its first sweep in over three years and head into the playoffs on a winning note. The River Cats have now not been swept in 120 consecutive series, dating back to July 3-6, 2006, when the Bees swept them in a three-game series in Salt Lake.

The River Cats slugged their way to an early 6-2 lead Monday behind a lead-off homer by Chris Denorfia and another solo shot by Chris Carter in the second inning. Tied 2-2 in the third, Aaron Cunningham singled home a run before Travis Buck hit a bases-clearing triple.

Sacramento's pitching took over from there. Starter Jerome Williams (5-6, 5.58) got the victory, allowing three runs (two earned) and three hits over 5.0 innings. The Sacramento bullpen then allowed one run over the remaining 4.0 innings.

Brett Wallace and Matt Carson each hit solo homers in the fifth inning, and Gregorio Petit added a two-run blast in the sixth for insurance. Carson's homer was his 25th of the season, a 2009 team high and tied for the sixth highest total in River Cats history.

Sacramento finished the season 86-57, its third-best record in franchise history.

Hounds Finish Regular Season In Style

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

On Saturday night, the RockHounds clinched the Texas League South Division second half pennant on Matt Sulentic's walk-off home run. On Labor Day, they made it official.

Tyson Ross, Jason Fernandez and Justin Friend combined on a 4-hit, 3-0 shutout over Frisco at Citibank Ballpark. With the win, the RockHounds claim the second half title outright ... no tie-breaker needed.

Ross, who is scheduled to pitch game four of the South Division Championship Series next Saturday, went 5.0 strong innings, allowing just three, 2-out singles, walking one and striking out five. After Fernandez went 3.0 scoreless, Friend took the regular season out in style, striking out the side in the ninth to the approval of 3.269 fans. Corey Brown's 2-run triple was the key swing of the bat, with "Browny" then scoring on Raul Padron's sacrifice fly capping a 3-run third inning. The trio of Ross, Fernandez & Friend took care of the rest.

The RockHounds finish the regular season with the Texas League's best record, 78-62, four games better than the Tulsa Drillers. Tulsa, despite an overall 74-66 record (second only to the 'Hounds), finished a close second in each half of the season, missing the North Division playoffs. Northwest Arkansas will meet the Springfield (MO) Cardinals in the North Division Championship Series.

The RockHounds, meanwhile, are back in the Texas League Playoffs for the third time in five seasons, opening the best-of-5 South Division Championship Series Wednesday at San Antonio (see below).

Wow: The RockHounds scored 811 runs over the course of the 140-game Texas League season. Northwest Arkansas was next ... with 703! Frisco was third with 680 ... 131 fewer than the 'Hounds.

Popcorn, Peanuts, Fresh Cut Grass & Playoffs!

The RockHounds host at least one ... and as many as three ... playoff games in the Texas League South Division Championship Series next week:

Games 1 & 2 at San Antonio (7:05 p.m.) on Wednesday & Thursday

Game 3 Friday, September 11 6:30 p.m. at Citibank Ballpark "Thirsty Thursday on a Friday!" Half-price soda and draft beer as the RockHounds host San Antonio in the division championship series.

Game 4 (*) Saturday, September 12 6:30 p.m. at Citibank Ballpark Post-game fireworks

Game 5 (*) Sunday, September 13 6:00 p.m. at Citibank Ballpark "Dollar Night"

(*) If necessary ... the playoffs are best 3-of-5

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." Games 1 & 2 will be aired from Nelson Wolff Stadium in San Antonio, beginning at 6:50 both evenings.

Ports Shutout In Last Game of Season

Visalia hands Ports their 10th shutout loss to split series

STOCKTON, Calif.— In the final game of the 2009 season, the Stockton Ports (61-79) offense was held in check by the Visalia Rawhide (64-76), as the Ports were shutout for the tenth time this summer. The final series of the season ended in a split between the two clubs.

Stockton starter Anthony Capra allowed three runs (two earned) on seven hits with seven strikeouts in 6.0 innings, and picked up his second loss of the season. Nick Walters, Hector Garcia and Jason Ray each tossed a scoreless inning of baseball. Christian Beltre picked up his sixth victory of the season for Visalia.

But the Ports offense and defense could not back up the strong pitching in the series and season finale. The Ports collected just four hits and committed two errors in the contest. Grant Green, the A's 2009 First Round Draft pick, went 2x4, in the game. Michael Richard and Shane Keough also singled in the contest.

The Rawhide took an early lead, pulling ahead 1-0 in the second inning. With two out, catcher Ed Easley hit a double to left center field. Easley came home to score on an RBI single by left fielder Brendan Duffy. Right fielder Greg Thomson got on base after being hit by a pitch. Shortstop David Cooper grounded into a fielder's choice to end the inning.

Visalia made it 3-0 in the fifth. Cooper led off the inning with a walk, and moved to third on a single by center fielder Ollie Linton. Second baseman James Skelton then stepped up to the plate, and struck out. But Ports catcher Gabriel Ortiz dropped the third strike, and threw the ball wildly into right field. Skelton reached first safely on the error and Cooper scored. With runners on first and third and no out, third baseman Kyle Greene came up to bat. He grounded into a 3 unassisted play, and Linton scored. The next two batters were retired in order to get out of the jam.

From there, the Ports would hold the Rawhide scoreless, holding them to just three hits from the sixth through ninth frames. The Rawhide bullpen was likewise stingy, allowing just one hit and two batters to reach base in the last four innings of the game.

The Ports end the game with a 36-34 record in the second half, a marked improvement from their 25-45 first half record. But the Ports end in last place in the North Division of the California League. Visalia ends the season in fourth place in the North Division.

The Ports will look forward to another year of competitive California League baseball in 2010, with another crop of rising stars of the Oakland A's farm system.

Ports Announce 2009 Award Winners

Ports unveil 2009 Fan of the Year, Employee of the Year and Player of the Year

STOCKTON, Calif. –The Stockton Ports are proud to announce the winners of the 2009 annual Ports awards. Each recipient was recognized in an on-field ceremony prior to the 6:05 p.m. game against Visalia on Monday, September 7.

Season ticket holders Rex and Mary Young were selected for the 2009 Fans of the Year. The Ports honored Lorraine Aguilar as the 2009 Employee of the Year. The Ports announced that the 2009 Player of the Year was outfielder Grant Desme. The Ports also recognized Steve Kleen as the first recipient of the newly created Dallas Braden Community Award.

The Youngs have been Ports fans since Billy Hebert Field was the home of the team. The Youngs, who are Lodi, Calif. residents, have been Ports season ticket holders for three years. With their season ticket plans, the Youngs said they have been able to enjoy the ballpark, the fun family environment and the other friendly fans who attend games.

"Rex and Mary Young have been steadfast supporters of the Ports for several seasons, and the Ports are truly grateful for their dedication and commitment to cheering on these young athletes. The Youngs have also always been a part of other Ports events, including the Hot Stove Banquet, the Manager's Luncheon and much more," said Ports President and General Manager Pat Filippone. "It's our great pleasure to honor the Youngs with this award this evening, in appreciation of their continuing support of the Stockton Ports."

Lorraine Aguilar, also known to Ports fans and staff as "Aggie," has been working with the Ports as one of the Bank of Stockton Kids Zone staffers. The 2009 season was her fifth working with the Ports.

"Lorraine has been exceptional with her responsibilities of maintaining an exciting and efficient Kids Zone," said Filippone. "She has been reliable, friendly and a model Ports game day representative at all Ports games. Her hard work and cheerful attitude exemplifies the excellent guest services the Ports provide."

Grant Desme joined the team following the All-Star Break from Single-A Kane County, and his outstanding performance has earned him 2009 Player of the Year honors. In 62 games with the Ports, Desme has posted a .304 batting average, with 12 doubles, four triples, 20 home runs and 51 RBI. Desme leads the team in home runs and is third on the team in RBI. Desme, in fact, leads the A's farm system with 31 total home runs, and ranks among Oakland organization leaders with 89 total RBI and 40 stolen bases this season. This is the second year in a row in which the farm system home run king has been a member of the Ports.

"Desme's offensive heroics have helped lift the team in the second half, keeping them in the chase for a playoff spot for most of the second half," Filippone said. "Not only has he been outstanding at the plate this season, Desme leads the outfielders with a .972 fielding percentage. The numbers he has posted this season reflect upon his hard work and dedication this summer. It's our pleasure to reward his success with the 2009 Player of the Year honors."

Steve Kleen was recognized for his extensive community service as the first winner of the Dallas Braden Community Award. Kleen worked as an instructor in the Ports Youth Baseball Camp in June, was one of two players to speak at the Manager's Luncheon in July, donated autographed memorabilia for the Ports Community Fund Weekend in August, and gave a testimonial to fans prior to the game on Faith Night on August 8. He has also made several other community appearances over the course of the season.

"Steve Kleen was a great player with the Ports in 2007, and since his return to the team in 2009, he has been a tremendous leader off the field as well as on," Filippone said. "We are very proud to honor him as our Dallas Braden Community Award winner this season."

"Braden has never forgotten his roots, and has always been ready to lend a hand here in Stockton, for the community and the Ports," Filippone added. "He has been a hero in the Stockton community for years, and we want to show our gratitude for his endless support through this award. Steve Kleen has definitely embodied the spirit of Braden's community commitment this season."

In a statement he sent the Ports, Dallas Braden said, "I sincerely appreciate Steve Kleen for coming into Stockton and giving so much of his time and effort to our town. I appreciate that he worked with the Stockton Ports in being involved with our community while he has been working on his baseball career. To think of other people is awesome and I want to thank Steve for doing so. Having the Stockton Ports name this award for me is the biggest honor bestowed on me in my career so far."

The Ports are proud to recognize and salute all five of these individuals for their contributions to an exciting and successful 2009 season.

Cougars Head to Playoffs off Victory

Kane County wins 11 of final 15 to close out regular season, looks to playoffs

GENEVA, III. – The Kane County Cougars wrapped up the regular-season portion of their 2009 schedule Monday afternoon by beating the Quad Cities River Bandits, 4-2, in front of 7,685 at Elfstrom Stadium. The Cougars finished at 75-64, the 6th-highest win total in the 19-year history of the franchise. Jeremy Barfield had three hits, Justin Murray got his fifth win and Paul Smyth notched his second save. The Cougars are off Tuesday and start the playoffs Wednesday night.

Tyler Ladendorf and Franklin Hernandez each nailed bases-loaded RBI singles in the second to give the Cougars a 2-0 lead. After the River Bandits scored once in the third and tied it in the eighth, the Cougars pulled ahead again in the eighth. Carlos Arrieche delivered a bases-loaded RBI fielder's choice, and a second run scored on a throwing error to make it 4-2.

Scott Deal made a spot start and gave up one in 2 2/3 innings in a no-decision. Jose Guzman tossed 3 1/3 scoreless, and A.J. Huttenlocker logged a run-free seventh. Murray (5-1) gave up a run in the eighth and got the win, and Smyth worked a 1-2-3 ninth for the save and ran his consecutive scoreless innings streak to 36 1/3.

The Cougars (35-35, 76-64), who won their final four series of the regular season, begin post-season play Wednesday night at 6:30 CT with the opener of a best-of-three series against the Burlington Bees. Game 1 is in Iowa and features Kenny Smalley (9-8, 2.73) against Ivor Hodsdon (3-1, 4.08). Game 2 is Thursday night at Elfstrom Stadium, and the Cougars would also host Game 3 if necessary.

Q&A With A's 35th Round Pick Paul Smyth, RP

David Malamut
OaklandClubhouse.com

Sep 7, 2009

When former Chicago White Sox reliever Shingo Takatsu was pitching in Japan, he earned the nickname "Mr. Zero" for being the most dominant closer in JPL history. Kane County reliever Paul Smyth could have earned the same nickname

with Vancouver this season, as he set a team record for most scoreless innings to start a career. David Malamut caught-up with Smyth this weekend...

To say that Paul Smyth's first experience in professional baseball has been a success would be an understatement. The former Kansas closer and 2009 35th round pick by the Oakland A's has appeared in 24 games as a professional this season and has yet to allow a run. In 35.1 innings for the Vancouver Canadians and Kane County Cougars, Smyth has given up only 14 hits and four walks while striking out 43. He has also saved 10 games.

The Atascadero, California, native was a four-year player at Kansas and Smyth is second on the all-time Kansas save list. He has used that experience and an unusual side-arm throwing motion to dominate Northwest and Midwest League hitters. David Malamut spoke to Smyth this weekend about his experience in Vancouver and Kane County, his college career, the origins of his throwing motion, and more...

David Malamut: How does the arm feel?

Paul Smyth: Arm feels good; I didn't get an opportunity to throw all that much in college this last year. I had a little bump in the road due to injury, plus we had a stocked bullpen, so I didn't get the normal innings to throw, so I'm feeling pretty fresh right now.

DM: Growing up in California what was your first baseball experience?

PS: Hitting wiffle balls in the backyard with my older brother Michael. That and just trying to learn how to play catch with my dad. We kind of asked him if we could start playing, my parents really didn't try to push it on us.

DM: Why did you go to Kansas University?

PS: I think it was an issue of a couple of things. I knew the head coach, I played with his sons for a few years in high school on my summer team, and he had already taken a couple of players from that team already to go there, so it was a comfort thing to go there, and know the coach and know a few players. And when I went to the campus I fell in love with the environment.

DM: What did you learn from your experience at Kansas?

PS: I think that playing in that conference and playing in such a competitive environment day in and day out, you just learn to basically play the game as hard as you can for nine innings. In college ball it's a lot different. You are playing to win every game. You play to win every game here, as well, but it's different when you play 60 games in a season compared to 140 games. When you have 60 you can stay more focused because you're not playing everyday, so you can focus your energy for every inning.

DM: How was closing in college?

PS: It was great. It was an awesome experience. I had a great opportunity to learn my freshman year. We had the NCAA 'Stopper of the Year' as a senior closer when I was a freshman and I would set him up and I think I learned as much from him as I did from anyone else in terms of focusing on taking one batter at a time. I think doing that for three years really helped me in any bullpen situation that I could get tossed into now.

DM: What is the difference in closing in college and the pros?

PS: I don't think there really is a big difference. I think maybe in pro ball with the length of the season you become more emotionally detached as a pro ball player. This is my first run at it so I couldn't tell you an exact thing but I think in college it is a lot more emotional. You get caught up in a lot of things. You go over scouting reports for a week in advance before you even get to face a guy. In pro ball, it is my first time facing a lot of these guys. I think it has helped to kind of get out there and run with it.

DM: What did you learn while playing in Alaska during the summer of 2007?

PS: It was a great experience. I loved Alaska. I had a great host family while I was out there. It was a good group of guys that I got to stay in good touch with and it's obviously considered one of the really good collegiate leagues. Anyone that plays there will tell you it is similar to pro ball. You are busing around -- I played in Peninsula so that is the farthest south -- so every trip we had to bus north. I think it kind of accustoms you to staying in not the best of motels and getting in a bus and going and playing that day. I think that prepares you for the kind of situation I'm in right now.

DM: Did you play in the Midnight Sun game?

PS: No I didn't play in the Midnight Sun game. I did play up in Fairbanks at that field that has been around since the

dawn of time.

DM: What did you learn from playing in Duluth, Minnesota, in 2006?

PS: That was really my first experience of playing an entire league with wood bats. I played against wood bats in fall ball when I was in high school against junior college teams and things like that and also throwing every day. I had done that in high school but never in an actual league. It was just pick-up games against other summer teams. This being a league and busing and playing against wood bats, you get the first experience of similar to what we are in right now.

DM: What did you learn pitching-wise?

PS: I think I don't know if it's something I learned. It was really stressed over there you have so many young pitchers which is the way the Northwoods League is that you learn to work the fastball in and get ahead of guys and especially with wood bats and especially there, and similar to what it is here, you get a lot of guys who are just getting used to using the wood bat and so they have the confidence of the metal bat approach and also they are swinging with wood and you can get in on them early in the count and break a few bats.

DM: What was it like playing for the Maxim Yankees in 2008?

PS: It was great. They asked me to come on just for July because I was finishing up summer classes in June so I could graduate. It was a laid back team and Jack Gifford -- God rest his soul, he just passed away this fall -- he was just an awesome, awesome guy. He gave his heart and soul to that team. There was no upside for him except enjoying the game. As great of a guy as he was, he put everything in place for guys like me and older players to play for summer and have something to play for in the end of the summer in Wichita.

It was a great experience. I loved playing for that team. It is called the Horizon League. There are not that many teams in the league. We played the Santa Barbara Foresters, a well-known team around there, and against teams like the Yuba Sutter Sox. [A's 2009 fourth-round pick] Max Stassi was playing on that team before he signed this year. It's kind of like teams up and down the Northern California area and around the coast.

DM: Do you think you benefited a lot from playing three years of summer ball in college?

PS: Yeah definitely. As a pitcher you need your innings. It was always a great break from playing in what I felt was the best conference in baseball in the Big 12 with metal bats. I think I put together some really good summers and it is also great because you get away from playing with just your team at the University. I got to play with guys from my conference and guys from all over the country. When I was in Vancouver, I played against guys I played with and against on that team. You get to know guys from all around so it was a great experience.

DM: How was being scouted?

PS: It was different at Kansas. A lot of times people are not there to watch you. They are there to watch the people you are playing against if you are playing against Texas or Oklahoma or you're playing against some first rounder and you're lucky to put together a good outing when they are around. I got one card from the guy that signed me and it turned out to be the most important card I ever filled out. It was a good experience but it wasn't too extensive for me.

DM: How was draft day?

PS: Exciting. I didn't get picked up until the third day. I kind of figured it was going to be a late round thing in the situation I had been in. It was thrilling. I think anyone no matter what situation you are in, if you are the number one pick or whether you are the last pick, it is an exciting thing to get drafted and to have a team recognize that they want you to be in their organization and kind of join their company essentially. I was happy that I was picked up by the A's more than anything. I grew up watching the A's. It was kind of the closest ballpark to where I'm at even though it was three hours away. It was always a lot of fun. I know my dad was as excited as I was that I got picked up by kind of a local team.

DM: Did you get to go to the A's games when you were younger?

PS: When I was younger those were the games that I got to go to. San Francisco was kind of equally close but their tickets were always more expensive than the A's. It was a big huge awesome ballpark to go to back when I was younger. We used to be able to watch guys like Mark McGwire and Jose Canseco play there so it was always awesome to go and watch those games.

DM: What is your favorite memory from an A's game?

PS: It probably isn't a very good A's memory, but I remember one of the games they were playing the Yankees and Darryl Strawberry came up to hit and I said, 'I'll bet Strawberry goes yard here,' and Strawberry went yard on the next

pitch. That wasn't that great for the A's but if I can remember that and I was that young I think it was pretty memorable.

DM: Where were you when you heard your name in the draft?

PS: Laying in bed actually. I wasn't really informed by anyone from the A's. I was called by my head coach in college who wanted to congratulate me. I didn't want to sit by the computer. I had a draft experience last year where I was sitting by the computer waiting for my name to get called for two days and it was the most miserable two days of my life, not getting my name called after all the promises that had been made. I didn't want to put myself through that so I figured I'm going to try to think positive thoughts and try to get away from the game and I spent most of the day at the beach the day before not thinking about it. When it came around obviously it's been all baseball since then.

DM: What was your experience like in Vancouver?

PS: It was awesome, one of the best baseball experiences I've had. The coaching staff there and the group of guys really made it. The guys I was working with, Lefty [pitching coach Craig Lefferts], Skip [Rick] Magnante, Casey [Myers, the hitting coach] and Sean [Doran], the strength coach, everyone there was unbelievably welcoming and the most supportive group of guys I've ever been around. Especially since all those guys have such extensive baseball backgrounds and to give that kind of credit and support to a rookie like me made it a home for me. My host family while I was out there was unbelievable. It was really one of the best baseball experiences I've ever had.

DM: How was being in another country?

PS: It was different. You know the currency was different. That was probably one of the bigger things to get accustomed to was paying for things in Canadian money and their loonies and toonies and all that stuff, but it was great. Vancouver is an awesome, awesome, very diverse town and I appreciated that as much as anyone else. Going to a place where you get a different feeling, it's not just Old Town, USA. It's Vancouver. It's a worldly city. They are getting ready for their Olympic Winter Games there and you can just tell the town is very outreaching. Very probably one of the best towns in the world.

DM: Have you ever started a game?

PS: I haven't started a game since I was a senior in high school. One time in college I threw the ninth inning of a game we had to pick up. We had a game cancelled that weekend and we had to play in the Metrodome at three in the morning on a Sunday after playing a doubleheader the night before starting at one AM. We didn't get through the ninth inning of the first game, so the following day we had to pick it up in the ninth. I was set to go the ninth, so I had my starting experience. I got the full stretch and all that stuff. That was as close as I've come to starting a game since high school.

DM: How was playing at the Metrodome?

PS: It was awesome. It was empty. There was like 15 people there. You could hear some echoes when there are only 15 people there, but it was awesome. It was great that those guys let you use the field.

DM: How has Kane County been?

PS: It has been awesome. I'm staying with the Drewes and Petey Paramore is my roommate. Everyone here has been just as welcoming as in Vancouver. I think it really has to do with the organization. The people that they hire and the fact that they are dealing with a lot of young guys, guys for whom it's probably their first couple of years in pro ball, and the way that they have it set up here -- the crowd has been great, as has the organizational staff and everyone -- it has just been awesome. I've really enjoyed it. They have given me just as good of an opportunity as I had in Vancouver and I have really enjoyed it.

DM: How have you put your major of business marketing to work for you?

PS: I think that what has kind of helped is that it's not even so much my major but just the fact that I got to spend four years in college at a good university. I feel like mentally I'm a little ahead of some of the younger guys that maybe didn't get to finish up their [college] career or maybe signed out of high school. Just in the sense that maybe I'm older and maybe the biggest thing is that I'm done with my [college] career.

I've finished my educational degree now, and I don't have another care in the world besides baseball. Really the fact that I don't have to worry about making class on time or worry about what classes I'm enrolling for in the fall, I can really just commit everything I can to playing baseball, so that has been the biggest thing right now.

DM: If you were not playing baseball what would you be doing?

PS: Probaby getting my graduate degree and maybe getting into an MBA program which I obviously can't do until I'm done playing. I've also considered looking to some law school to study some contract law.

DM: Would you become an agent?

PS: I would consider being an agent. I don't know if I would want to do it for baseball though. I think I might want to do it for something else. As much as I would like to be around the game and even if I could have the opportunity to stick around the game being an agent for baseball, I think I would like to be an agent for something else.

DM: What are your top 5 artists in your iPod?

PS: Slightly Stupid, Sublime, Bob Marley, Outkast, Tupac. I listen to a lot of music, all kinds of music. Usually I'll mix in a lot of things from reggae to rap. It's kind of my style.

DM: How did you develop your throwing motion?

PS: Probably at birth, I was probably born wrong. I've always thrown that way, people used to talk bad about my throwing motion when I was in little league. I'd have coaches telling me, 'get your arm up, you need to get that arm up when you are throwing the ball, you are going to hurt your arm.' I think if anything, over my days I've kind of developed a reputation of being able to throw as often as anyone in terms of having a rubber arm. I guess I'm glad it didn't turn out being the other way and it ended up hurting my arm. It has felt good. It has just been that way that ever since I was born. I have always thrown from the side and I kind of plan on keeping it that way.

DM: What do you throw?

PS: Fastball, slider and changeup. The slider is still a work in progress but it's getting a lot better.

DM: What do you ultimately want the pitches to do for you?

PS: I guess everything I'm trying to get to sink as much as possible, whether it's the fastball, changeup or slider. If I get a fastball to sink and I get a guy to ground out, that is what I am looking for. I guess all of my pitches kind of circle around the ultimate goal of trying to get a three-hop ground ball to someone making an easy ground ball play and involve the infield and keep everyone on the same page.

DM: What is your out-pitch?

PS: I'd like to say I strike people out with different pitches all of the time. I don't really have an out-pitch. I just throw whatever I think will work. I don't ever try to strike anyone out, to be honest. I was told a long time ago by a coach that scouting reports don't matter until you are ahead in the count. Ultimately my goal is to get ahead in the count but I would like the guy to ground out on the first or second pitch.

I guess when I get ahead in the count and I've picked up or I've been told that this guy struggles on the slider away, I'm going to throw the slider away. If I hear this guy struggles with keeping up with the fastball and I've got him ahead, I might try to throw the fastball. But it really just circles around what me and my catcher are feeling at that moment and kind of what the coaches tell me before, because a lot of times guys are hot on certain days and on other days they're not. I like to say I pitch more in the moment.

DM: What is your mentality on the mound?

PS: Strike one, I guess, and then strike two. My dad is one of the ones who always reminded me that you are at your best when you just try to take things pitch-by-pitch because if you involve yourself and you think, 'how am I going to strike this guy out?' at the start of the at-bat, I think you are kind of screwed from the get-go. You throw one pitch and as soon as that pitch is done, you focus on the next pitch.

DM: Have you ever played a different position?

PS: Yeah actually. I didn't start pitching until I was 16. Before that I was catching and playing third. Really my arm slot is what stopped me from catching. I was a pretty decent hitter in high school and I was pretty good behind the dish physically and everything. My throw down to second was never the best.

Yeah, I caught all the way up through my senior year in high school. I was the best catcher and the best pitcher, then when I was a junior I was the second-best catcher and the second-best pitcher because our catcher ended up going on to catch at Fresno State and winning himself a college world series.

DM: Do you think your catching experience has helped you with your pitching?

PS: Yeah definitely. I loved catching pitchers who got strike one and got ahead of guys. Nothing pissed me off more as a catcher than guys who were working around the strike-zone and not being aggressive to guys. I think as a pitcher you

keep that thing in mind and you got to know exactly what it is you are dealing with. You want to catch the kind of pitcher that you want to be. Essentially you have an idea of what you want to do as a catcher and you try to mimic that as a pitcher.

DM: Has that helped you in game-calling with the catcher?

PS: I think some of the bigger things that I have noticed is sometimes the set-up of the batter. If you see a guy trying to cheat in a little bit and sometimes that is something that a catcher will pick up on and the coach will sometimes say to the catcher 'if you see that guy creeping up and maybe the pitcher is not focusing on that you might want to bust him back in' and that is definitely something that I look at sometimes. Sometimes I see a guy cheating up to take away an off-speed pitch and I'll throw a fastball so I think that kind of helps me.

DM: When was the last time you hit?

PS: The last time I had an at-bat was the summer right before my freshman year in college. Other than that just pitchers BP. I was pretty close when I was in Alaska because I was putting on a show in BP and my coach said, 'if these guys don't start hitting the ball, we are going to make you hit,' but then he said my coach would kill him if I got hurt. If they would give me a helmet and tell me to go up there I'm going to try to get a base-hit and try to knock it out of the park, but no guarantees because I haven't had one in four years.

Canadians prove even losing baseball sells in Vancouver

BY LYNDON LITTLE, VANCOUVER SUN

Vancouver Canadians' Tyreece House is tagged out as he tries to steal second base against the Tri-City Dust Devils in August 2009. The Cs completed the season with a record of 36-40 — the third losing season in a row.

Are the Vancouver Canadians in danger of becoming the Chicago Cubs of the Northwest League, a franchise of lovable losers?

The C's completed their 2009 season Sunday afternoon with a 6-4 win over the Everett AquaSox at Nat Bailey Stadium. Despite the victory, the C's finished the year with a record of 36-40 — the third consecutive losing season for the short-season single-A team.

Are the fans getting disgruntled? You couldn't tell by the attendance. The final three-game homestand drew a total of 10,899 fans to reach a final season figure of 149,297 — No. 2 in the league and a record for the single-A ball in Vancouver.

With that kind of support does management still care about winning?

"Personally, I'd love to buy championships rings every year," says club president Andy Dunn. "I realize there's a portion of our fans who are here just for the entertainment. But there's another group that wants to see winning baseball. It's a delicate balance. I thought our coaching staff did an outstanding job this year. I thought the kids played hard. Unfortunately, we just didn't win as many games as we would have liked."

In a league where the front office has almost no say in the composition of the team, success or failure on the field is under the exclusive control of the parent Oakland A's. Oakland does have an enviable record of player development. But as yet it hasn't translated to many winning teams in Vancouver.

The Canadians did have some exceptional performances this past season from players not considered hot prospects coming out of the draft — such as 28th-round pick Connor Crumbliss (who reached base safely in 29 consecutive games); 35th-round right-hander Paul Smyth (who threw 29.1 scoreless innings) and left-hander Julio Ramos, an undrafted free agent who won six straight games after starting the season 0-5.

But all three were among a large group of players who were called up to the Midwest League just as the club was attempting to make a late-season push to respectability.

"Let's just say it was something that bothered us," said co-owner Jake Kerr of the untimely callups.

The C's have one year left on their current player development agreement with the A's and the local ownership is going to be keeping a keen eye on what goes on next season.

"It would be an understatement to say we're going to be watching closely," adds Dunn.

C NOTES: In the eighth inning Sunday the fans got to see the first triple play at the Nat since the 1980s. It was also the first triple play in the 26-year history of the AquaSox, which ended with C's Max Stassi being gunned down at the plate . . . Stassi, Michael Gilmartin, Ryan Ortiz and Wilfredo Sosa each had two hits for Vancouver Sunday . . . Crumbliss ended up with two year-end awards — player of the year and fan favourite . . . Adding in his record in the Midwest League, Smyth is now up to 35.1 innings without yielding a run.

Thank You Vancouver

By Rob Fai / Vancouver Canadians

Please enjoy the following letter from the Vancouver Canadians and Manager Rick Magnante:

I want to take a moment to say thank you to each and every one of you that took the time to come out to Nat Bailey Stadium and help cheer on our ballclub this summer. I cannot tell you the pride that we felt all season long playing for you and your community.

As Manager of the Vancouver Canadians I feel somewhat responsible for the product that we as a team put on the field, and I hope that this summer we represented you and your city well and with honour.

Our players come from all around North and Central America. Coming to Vancouver for your first year of professional baseball is an extraordinary experience. I cannot tell you how many players just days after arriving, wish they could stay and call Vancouver 'home'.

Your city, support and commitment to making professional baseball in Vancouver work is wonderful, and I feel privileged to be able to call this city my 'home away from home'.

On behalf of my entire staff, Craig Lefferts, Casey Myers, Travis Tims, Sean Doran, Glenn Hall and the players - thank you for opening up your doors and allowing us the thrill of playing for your hometown team - the Vancouver Canadians. What a treat for us all.

I hope to see you in 2010 where many more memories await.