

A's News Clips, Wednesday, September 9, 2009

A's strike early, rout White Sox

By Jack McCarthy, Oakland Tribune

The A's made a quick work of one rookie pitcher on Tuesday and didn't stop there.

A five-run first — including home runs from Jack Cust and Mark Ellis — provided more than enough punch as the A's claimed a 11-3 victory over the White Sox in the opener of a two-game series at U.S. Cellular Field.

"In the last couple of weeks we've had games where we got behind early and sometimes we battled back and sometimes we didn't," said manager Bob Geren. "This is the first time we've been on the other end of that in a while, and it felt good to get a nice lead early."

The A's hammered out 20 hits and handled six Chicago pitchers — including three first-year hurlers — on the way to their third straight victory.

White Sox rookie starter Carlos Torres, who shut out the crosstown Cubs in a makeup game last week, threw just 22 pitches and lasted only two-thirds of the first inning as the A's sent eight batters to the plate.

The A's loaded the bases with none out and got their first run on a one-out Kurt Suzuki sacrifice fly to right center to score leadoff batter Adam Kennedy. Cust then had the big blow — a 394-foot home run to right-center that scored three.

And not to be outdone, Ellis immediately followed with a 376-foot solo home run to left for a 5-0 lead.

That was it for Torres, who was lifted in favor of reliever D.J. Carrasco. He then lasted through the fourth, giving up three more earned runs.

A's starter Brett Tomko, meanwhile, improved to 4-3 for the season and 2-0 career against Chicago as he scattered three runs and six hits over 51/3 innings.

"The offense really picked it up and I benefited from that," said Tomko. "(A big lead) makes it a little easier to pitch and you can be a little more aggressive."

Chicago started to tag Tomko in the fourth with long flies from Paul Konerko and Jermaine Dye, followed by a two-run homer by former Athletic Mark Kotsay that broke the shutout.

In the fifth, the White Sox put runners on second and third with none out. Tomko, though, worked out of that jam as he struck out Scott Podsednik got Alexei Ramirez to line into an inning-ending double play.

In the sixth, Konerko sent a 2-2 pitch into the left field stands for a solo homer that cut the deficit to 9-3. After walking Dye, Geren had seen enough and brought in reliever Craig Breslow.

The A's lefty worked 12/3 scoreless innings and gave up one hit and a walk. Lefty Jerry Blevins came to pitch the eighth while Brad Kilby handled the ninth.

Notes: Right fielder Ryan Sweeney's four hits matched a career high, and Cust's home run was his team-best 21st. In his last 17 games, Cust is hitting .339 (19-of-56) with five homers and 11 RBI. "... Right-hander Trevor Cahill (8-12) is scheduled make his 29th start in today's finale, the last meeting of the teams this season. Cahill has won his last two starts and allowed three earned runs last in his last outing. "His breaking ball's improved, his changeup has improved and his command and fastball have improved," said Geren. "Those are all the things we've been shooting for with him." "... The A's future is on display just 40 miles west of Chicago as their Class- A affiliate, the Kane County Cougars, prepare for the upcoming Midwest League playoffs. The Cougars, who won the league's first half title, play Burlington (Wis.) in a three-game opening-round series. Starting shortstop Cliff Pennington passed through Kane County on his way to the big club. He's one of seven current A's who got their start there.

First inning homers lift A's

Tuesday, September 8, 2009

Jack Cust hit a three-run homer and Mark Ellis followed with a solo shot, fueling a five-run first inning and leading the Oakland A's to an 11-3 victory Tuesday night over the Chicago White Sox.

Ryan Sweeney matched a career high with four hits, all singles, and added three runs and two RBIs. Oakland's No. 3 batters have combined to hit .218 this season but Sweeney, a one-time top White Sox prospect who went to Oakland in 2008's Nick Swisher trade, is at .348 in his last five starts there.

Brett Tomko (4-3) allowed three runs on six hits in 5 1-3 innings for the A's, who had 20 hits.

Five days after shutting out the crosstown Cubs for seven innings, White Sox starter Carlos Torres (1-1) recorded only two outs.

He walked leadoff man Adam Kennedy and gave up singles to Rajai Davis and Sweeney, loading the bases with nobody out. After Scott Hairston struck out and Kurt Suzuki hit a sacrifice fly, Cust hit his 21st homer of the season. Two pitches later, Ellis connected to make it 5-0 and chase Torres.

Oakland got two more runs in the second, with Sweeney getting an RBI single and scoring on Hairston's double as boos rained down on the home team.

Hairston doubled in another run in the fourth before the White Sox pulled to 8-2 in the bottom of the inning as Tomko hit A.J. Pierzynski in the elbow and gave up Mark Kotsay's two-run homer. Pierzynski stared at Tomko momentarily but went to first base without incident.

When Pierzynski and Tomko were San Francisco teammates in 2004, Tomko accused the catcher of being a clubhouse cancer. Before Tuesday's game, White Sox manager Ozzie Guillen said: "If A.J. thinks Mr. Tomko hit him on purpose, he's got my permission to kick his butt."

Suzuki had an RBI double in the sixth, Davis singled in a run in the seventh and Sweeney added an RBI single in the ninth. Paul Konerko homered in the sixth for the White Sox.

NOTES: If White Sox RHP Jake Peavy has an effective, pain-free throwing session Wednesday, he could start as soon as this weekend, pitching coach Don Cooper said. Peavy, acquired from San Diego at the trading deadline, has been on the DL since June 13 with an ankle injury. He was just rounding into shape when he was struck on the right elbow by a line drive Aug. 29 in his fourth rehab start. ... Suzuki is batting .320 on the road vs. .220 at home. ... White Sox 3B Gordon Beckham missed his third straight game with a sore side.

A's leading off

Chronicle Staff Report

Field report: The A's have seen the worst of their Raiders-wrecked field. The Aug. 14 game one night after the Dallas exhibition was the quickest turnaround the grounds crew faces. The sod squad has three, then five days to make repairs following two NFL regular-season games.

Big first inning fuels A's victory

Oakland cruises past Chicago for third straight win

By Jesse Temple / MLB.com

CHICAGO -- Don't look now, but the Athletics officially are on a winning streak.

The A's used a five-run first inning to propel themselves to an 11-3 victory over the White Sox on Tuesday night at U.S. Cellular Field. In doing so, Oakland won its third straight game for the first time in more than a month.

"In the last couple weeks, we've had a few games where we got behind early," A's manager Bob Geren said. "Sometimes we battled back; sometimes, we didn't. That's the first time we've been on the other end of that in a while. It felt good to get a nice lead early."

Oakland (62-76) struck early and often against Chicago rookie starter Carlos Torres. Ryan Sweeney singled to left in the first inning after an Adam Kennedy leadoff walk and a Rajai Davis single, loading the bases with no outs. Following a strikeout, Kurt Suzuki hit a sacrifice fly to right field.

Jack Cust then provided the biggest blow, smacking a three-run homer over the wall in right-center field for his 21st home run this season. Mark Ellis followed with a home run to left-center field for a quick 5-0 A's edge.

It was the fifth time this season Oakland hit back-to-back home runs, with the previous time coming on Aug. 9 at Kansas City. The consecutive homers also were enough to knock Torres from the game after just two-thirds of an inning.

"He had a chance to get out of it, giving up one run and minimizing damage," White Sox catcher A.J. Pierzynski said. "He made a mistake to Cust and he hit it out, and [he] made a mistake to Ellis and he hit it out, and we are down quick. It's tough to come back from stuff like that."

Backed by seven runs in the first two innings, A's starter Brett Tomko picked up the victory to improve to 4-3. Tomko, who allowed three runs on six hits in 5 1/3 innings, has thrown six innings only once in his five starts with the A's, but he is still 3-1 in that span.

"Any time you get runs right off the bat, it makes it a little easier to pitch," Tomko said. "You can be a little bit more aggressive. Sweeney had an awesome day. The guys coming off just getting in yesterday, they came out swinging, and it's nice to see."

Tomko struck out three, walked one and threw 82 pitches, but Geren had seen enough after the veteran right-hander surrendered a homer and a walk in the sixth with a 9-3 lead.

"We had a pretty good lead at the time, and I had about nine relievers down there and a lot of them have been throwing the ball pretty well," Geren said. "So at that point, I just felt like after the walk [I wanted] to go ahead and get him."

Geren brought in Craig Breslow, who promptly induced a lineout double play to second base off the bat of Alexei Ramirez.

"It probably didn't look like much in the box score, but that was a big out," Geren said. "One out right there -- if they get a hit or two there, anything can happen."

Instead, Oakland continued its offensive onslaught, tacking on a run in both the seventh and ninth innings. Every starter collected a hit as the A's tallied their most hits in a game (20) since registering 21 on July 28 against Boston.

Sweeney was particularly successful at the plate, as he tied a career high with four base hits -- all singles. He last accomplished the feat on Sept. 16, 2008, against the Angels.

"I just tried to stay within myself and hit the ball where it was pitched," Sweeney said. "[They were] not like really line drives or outstanding hits, but it worked."

Sweeney and Davis scored three runs each.

Oakland last won three consecutive games from Aug. 3-5, taking the first three contests of a four-game set against Texas.

"I think the last five, six, seven, eight series or so, we've played very well," Geren said. "We really have. It's good to see, because all these young guys are jelling together as a group and they've also got something to prove -- and guys are doing a good job."

Mazzaro may return next week

Mortensen filling spot in Oakland's six-man rotation

By Jesse Temple / MLB.com

CHICAGO -- If all goes according to plan, A's rookie right-hander Vin Mazzaro could be back in the starting rotation as early as next week.

That prognostication was shared by both Mazzaro and Oakland manager Bob Geren before Tuesday night's game against the White Sox at U.S. Cellular Field. Mazzaro has been out with right shoulder tendinitis since last Friday, when he was scratched from his scheduled start.

Mazzaro said he would throw out to 80 feet before Wednesday's game in Chicago, take a day off and test his shoulder again with tosses up to 120 feet on Friday, when the team plays in Minnesota.

"This is the first time having it," Mazzaro said of the malady. "But I'm not really concerned. I got it checked out. It's just a mild case of tendinitis. So we'll just see if this rest helps -- get back and maybe get two or three starts to end the season."

Geren remained optimistic that the 22-year-old Mazzaro would be able to finish out this season on the mound.

"If everything goes well, he can throw a bullpen, maybe Sunday," Geren said. "If that goes well, then we can get him back in for a start. But he has to pass each stepping stone to what we feel is acceptable."

In 17 starts this season, Mazzaro is 4-9 with a 5.32 ERA over 91 1/3 innings. Including his 10 games at Triple-A Sacramento, he has thrown 148 innings -- fewer than his total in the Minor Leagues during 2008 -- which is why Mazzaro didn't blame wear and tear for his tendinitis.

"I went 170 innings last year, so I don't think it took that much of a toll on my body," Mazzaro said. "Yeah, it's a long season, but I think I'm used to it, throwing a lot of innings."

While Mazzaro recovers from injury, A's rookie righty Clayton Mortensen will continue to pitch in his place. Mortensen was recalled from Sacramento on Friday to take Mazzaro's turn in the rotation. In his last outing, Mortensen went seven innings, allowing four runs on six hits with three walks and one strikeout in a 6-3 loss to the Mariners.

Mortensen, 24, is scheduled make his second start since being recalled on Friday against the Twins.

"I definitely feel like I'm getting more comfortable up here," said Mortensen, who was acquired from the Cardinals in the July trade for Matt Holliday. "Every day, just go out and work harder and ... it will keep coming."

Since the start of September, Geren has been using a six-man pitching rotation in an effort to save his young starting staff from racking up innings in the final month of the season.

"I've got six in there now," Geren said, "and if Vinnie gets back in, then one of the six will just go to the bullpen."

Cahill grinding through rookie season

Oakland (62-76) at Chicago (69-71), 5:11 p.m. PT

By Jesse Temple / MLB.com

CHICAGO -- Trevor Cahill knew some lumps would present themselves along the way during his first season as a Major League pitcher.

But nothing could fully prepare the 21-year-old A's righty for all the difficult developments that accompany roughly 30 starts during a 162-game Major League season -- until he actually experienced the grind first-hand.

"You want to go in thinking that the success you had in the Minor Leagues is going to continue and you're going to dominate, but that's not really how it usually works out," Cahill said. "It's definitely a long season and it takes a toll.

Over three Minor League seasons with four teams, Cahill went 22-9 with a 2.68 ERA in 45 games (42 starts).

Unfortunately for Cahill, that success has not yet arrived with him in the big leagues. In 28 starts this season, Cahill is 8-12 with a 4.66 ERA.

On Wednesday night, Cahill will continue his rookie campaign against White Sox right-hander Freddy Garcia in the final game of a two-game set at U.S. Cellular Field.

"Right now, I'm just trying to figure out from different people how they keep feeling good through the season, especially this last month -- whatever it is, maybe backing off or not throwing every day in between -- stuff like that to make sure you finish strong this last month."

Cahill certainly looked strong through the first half of the 2009 season. On June 22, Cahill picked up a 5-1 victory over the Giants to improve to 5-5 on the season with a 3.68 ERA.

Over his next 11 starts, however, he won just one, falling to 6-12 for the season.

"I think I learned more from that stretch than from the beginning of the year, when I was having a little bit of success," Cahill said. "I learned a lot for next year. Hopefully next year when I don't have my best stuff, I can still get by. That helps the ERA and the record. Hopefully I learned enough this year, which will help me next year and the years to come."

To Cahill's credit, he has recovered of late by winning his past two starts. He's allowed three runs in 12 innings, including a seven-inning shutout performance on Aug. 27 against the Angels.

Oakland manager Bob Geren said he was pleased with Cahill's development as a pitcher this season.

"His breaking ball has improved," Geren said. "[His] changeup has improved and command of his fastball has improved. Those are all the things that we were shooting for with him. They still have more room to go, but where he was a month or two ago compared to where he is now, we're happy with his progress."

Pitching matchup

OAK: RHP Trevor Cahill (8-12, 4.66 ERA)

Cahill allowed three earned runs in five innings against Kansas City on Wednesday, surrendering all three runs in the third. He gave up six hits, walked two and struck out three to earn the win. The rookie is 2-1 with a 2.81 ERA over 32 innings in his past five starts. He'll look to keep things going against a White Sox team he's held to four runs in 11 2/3 innings (3.08 ERA) over two starts.



CWS: RHP Freddy Garcia (1-2, 4.76 ERA)

Garcia didn't need his best stuff in a 12-2 blowout victory over the Red Sox on Friday night, but he pitched well enough to win even if the game had been close. Staked to a 12-1 lead after four innings, Garcia lasted six frames and surrendered just one run on seven hits with five strikeouts and one walk. He picked up his first victory since Sept. 17, 2008, when he was a member of the Tigers. Garcia posted his third straight quality start, but Friday was the first time he allowed fewer than three runs in an outing this season. Lifetime against the A's, Garcia is 6-6 with a 5.08 ERA in 19 starts.

Tidbits

Brett Tomko earned his first win against the White Sox since April 28, 2001, and his first as a starter against the South Siders since June 25, 1998. ... Tomko has allowed at least one home run in each of his past four starts. ... Over his past 17 games, Jack Cust is hitting .339 (19-for-56) with five home runs and 11 RBIs. He also has reached base safely in every game during that stretch. ... Rajai Davis scored his most runs in a game since Aug. 10, 2007, against the Pirates, crossing the plate four times on Tuesday.

Up next

- Thursday: Off-day
- Friday: A's (Clayton Mortensen, 0-2, 9.00) at Twins (Nick Blackburn, 9-10, 4.16), 5:10 p.m. PT 
- Saturday: A's (Brett Anderson, 8-10, 4.45) at Twins (Jeff Manship, 0-0, 4.41), 10:10 a.m. PT 

Two homers in five-run first spark A's to victory

Associated Press

Five days after becoming an instant South Side star by shutting out the crosstown rival Cubs for seven innings, Carlos Torres was just another frustrated player on the off-and-on Chicago White Sox.

Torres recorded only two outs -- the shortest outing by a Sox starter in more than six years -- while giving up consecutive home runs to Jack Cust and Mark Ellis in Tuesday night's 11-3 loss to the Oakland Athletics.

Chicago, which trails Detroit by 7 1/2 games in the AL Central, had just taken three of four from Boston.

"That's White Sox 2009," manager Ozzie Guillen said. "If you want to compete in any season, you beat the crap out of teams with a losing record and you fight against the other ones. We do totally opposite of what we should do."

After taking consecutive series from the Yankees and Angels earlier this summer, the White Sox promptly lost two of three to Cleveland. They are 15-17 against the league's three last-place teams -- Oakland, Baltimore and Kansas City.

"It's just been an up-and-down year. You can look at our record and tell," catcher A.J. Pierzynski said of his 69-71 White Sox.

"They came out swinging the bats and didn't miss the mistakes, and when you fall behind that quick it's tough to come out of it against any team. It doesn't matter if they're young or old or good or bad."

Torres (1-1) opened his fourth career start by walking Adam Kennedy. He then gave up singles to Rajai Davis and Ryan Sweeney, loading the bases with nobody out. After Scott Hairston struck out and Kurt Suzuki hit a sacrifice fly, Cust hit his 21st homer of the season. Two pitches later, Ellis connected to make it 5-0 and chase Torres.

"I walked the first guy and started settling back in, throwing strikes, but then every ball that I threw over the plate got hit," said Torres, who recorded only one more out than Neal Cotts did in an Aug. 28, 2003, loss to the Yankees.

Oakland, which has just its second three-game winning streak in three months, was glad to take advantage.

"The last couple of weeks, we've had a few games where we got behind early," A's manager Bob Geren said. "It's the first time we've been on the other end of that in a while, and it felt good to take a nice lead."

Brett Tomko (4-3) allowed three runs on six hits in 5 1-3 innings and was the beneficiary of a 20-hit Oakland attack that included Ryan Sweeney's four singles.

"Anytime you get runs right off the bat, it makes it a little easier to pitch and you can be a little more aggressive," Tomko said. "The guys just came in swinging."

Sweeney, a one-time top White Sox prospect who went to the A's in the 2008 Nick Swisher deal, scored three runs and drove in two more. Oakland's No. 3 batters have combined to hit .218 this season but Sweeney is at .348 in his last five starts there.

Oakland took a 7-0 lead in the second, with Sweeney getting an RBI single and scoring on Hairston's double as boos rained down on the home team.

Hairston doubled in another run in the fourth before the White Sox pulled to 8-2 in the bottom of the inning as Tomko hit Pierzynski on the elbow and gave up Mark Kotsay's two-run homer. Pierzynski stared at Tomko momentarily but went to first base without incident.

When Pierzynski and Tomko were San Francisco teammates in 2004, Tomko accused the catcher of being a clubhouse cancer. Before Tuesday's game, White Sox manager Ozzie Guillen said: "If A.J. thinks Mr. Tomko hit him on purpose, he's got my permission to kick his butt."

Tomko said afterward he didn't mean to hit Pierzynski, who said he doubted it was intentional.

Suzuki had an RBI double in the sixth, Davis singled in a run in the seventh and Sweeney added an RBI single in the ninth. Paul Konerko homered in the sixth for the White Sox.

Cure for baseball fever is potion No. 9

Take a look at players who wore it and records tied to it

By Marty Noble / MLB.com

Nine has at least as much significance in baseball as any of its countless cousins -- and more than most. Nine men on a side, if only in the National League. The game with no clock has innings as its unit of time, and there are nine of them in most games. And the "bottom of the ninth" is the sport's most prominent half-inning, even though it's not always contested.

Ted Williams wore No. 9 splendidly. And the No. 9 position, right field, has a remarkable history in New York -- from Ruth to Roger to Reggie. From Winfield to Strawberry to Paul O'Neill.

But nine isn't readily associated with a high-profile record. The most runs scored by one player in a game is six. Nolan Ryan pitched seven no-hitters, and Dale Long, Don Mattingly and Ken Griffey hit home runs in eight straight games. And nine is ... well. What is it?

Admirers of Johnny Burnett know. The late Indians shortstop had nine hits in one game, the most ever. Mr. Burnett established his record against Connie Mack's Philadelphia A's in an 18-inning game, played July 10, 1932, in League Park in Cleveland. The Indians won, 18-17.

On this date, the first 9-9-09 in 100 years, a day when the remastered Beatles CDs are to be released ("Number 9, number 9, number 9"), MLB.com salutes Burnett, his record, Williams, Maris, Reggie and a host of nines, not the least of which is this year.

Mothballs

Six clubs have retired uniform No. 9: Red Sox for Williams, Cardinals for Enos Slaughter, Pirates for Bill Mazeroski, Athletics for Reggie Jackson, White Sox for Minnie Minoso and Yankees for Roger Maris.

9 X 9

- Luis Aparicio led the American League in stolen bases nine consecutive seasons (1956-1964), the most ever.
- Babe Ruth produced a slugging percentage of at least .700 nine times, the most ever.
- The '69 Mets won nine games by the score 1-0.
- Mike Schmidt (1976-84) and Ryne Sandberg (1983-1991) won Gold Gloves in nine successive seasons.
- Mike Greenwell had nine RBIs in the Red Sox's 9-8, 10-inning victory against the Mariners at the Kingdome on Sept. 2, 1996, the most RBIs by a player driving in all his team's runs in one game.
- Joe Adcock and Willie Mays hit nine home runs each at Ebbets Field in 1954 and 1955, respectively, the most home runs ever hit in a single season in one park by visiting players.

- Minoso led the big leagues in being hit by a pitch nine times, the most ever.
- Mazeroski led National League second basemen in assists in nine seasons, the most ever.
- Lefty Grove led the American League in ERA nine times, the most ever.

9 + 9 + 9 = 3 in Hall of Fame

Joe DiMaggio and Bob Feller, more readily recognized respectively as Nos. 5 and 19 with the Yankees and Indians, wore uniform No. 9 as rookies in 1936. Bobby Doerr, No. 1 through most of his career with the Red Sox, wore No. 9 as a rookie in 1937, two years before Ted Williams took over the number.

No. 9, No. 9, No. 9

The No. 9 card among active members of the Baseball Writers' Association of America belongs to Mike Waldner of the South Bay Daily Breeze in the Los Angeles-Anaheim chapter of the BBWAA.

The value of 9?

Casey Candaele, the Expos' second-year second baseman, graciously offered his uniform number, No. 9, to Graig Nettles after the former Yankees third baseman joined the Expos in Spring Training 1988, and Nettles accepted. He had worn No. 9 for three seasons with the Indians, 11 seasons with the Yankees and three with the Padres before wearing No. 19 with the Braves in 1987.

Ozzie Virgil Jr. wore No. 9 with the Braves that year.

"That was a nice gesture. Casey didn't have to do it," Nettles said at the time. "I might have asked him about it after I got to know him. But he just offered it.

"Ozzie offered last year, too. ... He offered to sell it."

Three "other" 9's

Since Williams first wore the Sox's No. 9 in 1939, three others have worn it. Lou Finney, Johnny Peacock and Hal Wagner took turns in 1944 while Williams was in the service.

The one and only

Rich Rollins wore No. 9 for the Seattle Pilots in their only season.

DOB 9-9

Todd Zeile, one of nine players in big league history whose surnames begins with Ze, was born on Sept. 9, 1965.

Gone

The great Catfish Hunter died on 9-9-99 at age 53.

9-9-99

Brady Anderson, Jeromy Burnitz, Ken Caminiti, Jose Canseco, Erubiel Durazo, Steve Finley, Brad Fullmer, Karim Garcia, Wiki Gonzalez, Marquis Grissom, Vladimir Guerrero, Jerry Hairston Jr., Mike Piazza, Gary Sheffield, Sammy Sosa, Greg Vaughn and Daryle Ward hit home runs on Sept. 9, 1999. The home runs were the ninth for Caminiti, Durazo and Fullmer.

Dressed to the 9's

We present our No. 9 All-Star team. All selections wore No. 9 at some point in their careers. In two cases, we had to bend the rules a bit.

- Warren Spahn, whom we recall as No. 21, was selected because he led the league or tied for the league leadership in complete games nine times.

- No closer wearing No. 9 could be found. So we assigned the No. 9 inning to Mariano Rivera.

The All-9 lineup:

Arky Vaughn SS
Vince DiMaggio CF
Ted Williams DH
Joe Adcock 1B
Reggie Jackson RF
Enos Slaughter LF
Graig Nettles 3B
Tim McCarver C
Bill Mazeroski 2B

Manager: Joe Torre

Pitchers:

Warren Spahn LHP
Bob Feller RHP
Mariano Rivera RP

Bench:

Minnie Minoso OF
Roger Maris OF
Hank Bauer OF
Gregg Jefferies DH
Todd Hundley C
Todd Zeile 3B, 1B, C

Hairston slam helps A's beat M's

Giovanni Albanese, Jr., Tri City Voice, 9/7/09

Gio Gonzalez and Scott Hairston both reached career firsts for the Oakland A's, leading to a 5-2 win over the Seattle Mariners in the series finale, earning them a split with their AL West foe.

> Gonzalez reached a career best seven innings pitched, evening his season record to 5-5, ending his three-game losing streak in the process. It was Gonzalez's first win over Seattle in his career.

> "It's exciting, finally getting through the seventh inning," said Gonzalez. "Everything came out beautifully for me."

> In his seven innings, Gonzalez allowed two runs on six hits, striking out three and walking two.

> "He's becoming a complete pitcher," said Landon Powell, who caught Gonzalez on Sunday afternoon. "He's doing everything he can do to stay in the rotation and make a name for himself."

> But when Gonzalez came off the mound after completing his seventh inning, he was on the line for the loss with the A's trailing 2-1.

> Shawn Kelley relieved Seattle starting pitcher Doug Fister (5 IP, 1 ER, 7 H, 2 BB, 5 K) after five innings and allowed the first three runners of the seventh to reach on two singles and a hit batter. After striking out Ryan Sweeney, Hairston came up and drilled an 0-1 slider by Kelley over the wall in left for his first career grand slam.

> "It came at a great time," said Hairston of his seventh homer with the A's, 17th overall. "Having that ball go out was a big lift off my shoulders.

> "The at bat I had (in the 5th with the bases loaded) I popped out and that got under my skin," Hairston continued. "I was just thinking of a good pitch to drive. It was nice to come through."

> Brad Ziegler and Andrew Bailey threw two shutout innings for Gonzalez to secure the win for the A's, their second in a row over the M's, as they split the four-game set, ending their home stand on a winning note.

> Bailey recorded his 23rd save of the year, tying the A's rookie record for saves with Huston Street, who accomplished that feat in 2005.

> "It's similar in that Huston started the year and wasn't the closer and due to one or another reason, he became the closer," A's Manager Bob Geren said of Bailey in comparison to Street's rookie campaign. "And hopefully he'll take those same footsteps and become rookie of the year ... he has a ways to go, but hopefully he'll get quite a few more (saves)."

> Gonzalez put Oakland in an early hole, allowing a leadoff double to Ichiro Suzuki on the second pitch of the game, his 2,000th hit of his career. Two batters later, Jose Lopez singled home Suzuki, giving the M's the 1-0 lead.

- > In the fourth, Powell homered to left-center off Fister to even the game at 1-1 before Seattle regained the lead in the sixth.
- > Adiran Beltre singled home Franklin Gutierrez with one out in the sixth, putting runners at the corners. Seattle couldn't add to their lead, however, as Gonzalez induced a line out to center by Bill Hall and a groundout to first by Kenji Johjima to end the frame.
- > After the come-from-behind victory, the A's upped their record to 61-76, 21 games behind the first-place Los Angeles Angels; Seattle dropped the 72-66, 10 and a half games behind the Angels in the AL West.
- > After splitting their four-game set with the M's at home, the A's travel to Chicago to take on the White Sox at US Cellular Field beginning Tuesday, 5:11 p.m. Oakland time. Brett Tomko (3-3, 4.40) will toe the rubber for the A's, battling Carlos Torres (1-0, 3.86) of the White Sox. Seattle continues south, traveling to Anaheim to take on the Los Angeles Angels, beginning Tuesday night at 7:05. Mariners ace Felix Hernandez (14-5, 2.65) will oppose recent acquisition (from Tampa Bay Rays) Scott Kazmir (8-8, 5.68).
- > Game notes: Suzuki's 2,000th career MLB hit is the second fastest to the feat in the league's history, only being Al Simmons. Time of game: 2 hours, 20 minutes. Attendance: 16,188. Umpires: Jim Reynolds, home plate; Bill Welke, first base; James Hoye, second base; and Ted Barrett, third base.

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Oakland A's Prospect Q&A: Michael Spina, 3B

David Malamut
OaklandClubhouse.com

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Oakland A's 2009 11th round pick Michael Spina came to the A's organization with a reputation of being a power hitter, and he hasn't disappointed in his first professional season. The third baseman hit seven homers in 190 at-bats and posted a .432 SLG. David Malamut spoke with Spina over the weekend...

Michael Spina left the University of Cincinnati as the Bearcats' all-time leading homerun hitter, but he was a relatively unheralded prospect going into the draft. Spina is hoping to follow the same path as the man that he overtook to set the Bearcats' homerun record, Kevin Youkilis, who was also an under-the-radar prospect at the start of his career.

Spina is off to a good start. He jumped almost immediately to full-season baseball and Low-A Kane County after signing with Oakland (he played two games with the A's Rookie League team first). Despite playing against opponents who had significantly more professional experience than he did, Spina held his own, batting .255 with seven homers, 28 RBIs and a .776 OPS in 184 at-bats in the pitcher-friendly Midwest League. Spina even overcame a scary injury in early July when he was hit in the face by a pitch.

David Malamut spoke with Spina over the weekend...

David Malamut: You played in 108 games this year. How do you feel?

Michael Spina: I feel alright. I've had a couple of set-backs while I was getting here. A couple of injuries and getting sick. Other than that, I feel good. Physically I've been prepared. My body feels good right now. I think it is more mental for everybody right now, it's more mental and you just got to keep going and play hard.

DM: What was your first baseball experience?

MS: My father coached me in Florida youth competitive baseball. That was the first year that I went to the playoffs. My father coached me up all the way through high school. I give him credit for a lot of my success, he helped me get to who I am today and the hard work and effort that I have I developed from him.

DM: Why did you go to Florida Community College?

MS: Out of high school I had a lot of Division One colleges after me, especially all the ones in Florida -- Florida State and Florida and Miami -- but I didn't have SAT scores to get into the schools so I had to look for my second option that was JUCO. At the time Dez Hamilton, he was a scout for the Pittsburgh Pirates, had seen me play a lot and he talked to me and I went there on a full ride. I got better and worked on some things I needed to work on to become more mature in baseball. Then Cincinnati came along and offered me a scholarship.

DM: What did you learn at Cincinnati?

MS: I learned a lot in Division One. Division One is a big step from junior college and high school, I'll tell you that much. It makes you mature real quick to face some of the best guys in the nation playing Louisville, Notre Dame, schools like that in the Big East. You have got to learn quick or you are just going to be one of those guys that don't succeed. I was one of the guys that caught on pretty quick.

I had successful years there. I had a great time. I learned a lot from the coaching staff -- Coach Cleary and Coach Meador, my hitting coach. Coach Meador, he changed my hitting around. I became a lot more of a power hitter hitting a lot of homeruns there in Cincinnati. I had never done that before in my career. I give some of my success to him and my coach. He wanted to change my hitting and it worked out for the best.

DM: What does the homerun record at Cincinnati mean to you?

MS: It means a lot to me to beat the guy that is in the big leagues right now in Kevin Youkilis. It probably means about everything to me right now in college baseball, to be put on one of the top notches in Cincinnati baseball history ever, it means a lot to me. There is not a word that I can use to describe it. I mean that is just amazing to me.

DM: Why did you not sign with Minnesota last year?

MS: After the year I put up, hitting .373 with 21 homeruns, getting drafted in the 45th round was kind of more of an insult to me to be honest. I thought the best opportunity for me was to come back and get more of my schooling done and put up another great year and see what happens from there. I know schooling will take me further in life, so I went one step further in getting my education and now I'm playing pro ball which was my dream.

DM: What did you learn from going back for your senior year?

MS: I have five classes to go, after which I will graduate this off-season. I learned more of how to be a leader as a senior at a Division One. All of the young guys coming in, they look up to you and you have got to play a role where they have to follow you. You got to lead by example which I think I did pretty well. We had a lot of freshman starting and we got to the Big East Tournament. This year we didn't have everything to get into the championship again like we did the year before, but I think it was a learning experience for a lot of the guys. I thought I was a pretty good role model and hope to have another good year this year.

DM: What was the experience like playing for the Amsterdam Mohawks in the college summer league, and what did you learn from it?

MS: It was a great atmosphere. It was a learning experience, that's for sure. It was a small town up north in New York. The town probably had 10,000 people and about every night we had about half those people at our games. Everyone knew each other. It was fun. Spags, who is our GM there, he keeps in contact with me. I developed like a family there. My host family is there. We all keep in contact, they are great people to have. They are supportive of me and they help me through every day.

DM: And how was hitting with wood?

MS: I've hit with wood all my life growing up in Florida. Hitting in all the wood bat tournaments you play in, it's nothing really different, especially when we played in Division One. We hit with wood in the off-season. We were not allowed to pick up a metal bat, so you have to develop and learn to hit with a wood bat. I think doing that growing up has helped me now. If you don't pick up a wood bat and don't know where the sweet spot is you are going to have trouble.

DM: How much different is hitting for power with a wood bat compared to a metal bat?

MS: With a wood bat, you have to hit it on the sweet spot. If you want it to go with the metal bat, you could hit it anywhere on that bat and it'll go far. It tests your ability and it tests your strength. I think wood bats are more of a challenge and I love it.

DM: How was being scouted?

MS: Scouting was, ah, I don't even know what the word for it is. Not nervous but nerve-racking. People all over you every day, going to school at the same time and these guys calling you everyday and just on you about everything. It was a learning experience, that's for sure. It is their job to nag and pick and see who you are and see if you have a problem because they are going to invest money in you. It was a learning experience and something I will never forget.

DM: How was draft day?

MS: It was great. I was relaxed. I was with my fiancée and her family and my mother and father and brother flew up from Florida and we pretty much had a family get-together at her parents' house and just watched it on the computer. It was a nerve-racking day since I was a senior, but other than that it was a relaxed day, an exciting day. I got a call from

Oakland in the 11th round and I can further play baseball now.

DM: How was being drafted by the A's?

MS: I've liked it so far. I know it's one of the better organizations to be drafted by. They treat their guys real well. They don't look down upon people. We all get along. They call us the Swinging A's because we swing. We like hitting. It was a good organization for me to be in. I've loved it so far and hopefully I can move on up.

DM: What was Arizona like?

MS: Hot. I got there and I didn't know anything about it because I've never been to Arizona before. I got there and got off the plane and was like, 'wow this is hot.' I've been in Cincinnati for two years and haven't been used to that hot weather. I got there and showed up and didn't know what to do. I just got thrown in the bunch, got on the field and showed my tools. About a week after that -- after I got my physicals and everything done -- I ended up here in Kane County.

DM: How about the move to Kane County?

MS: It's been great. The fans are good to have. We get a good crowd every day here at home. If you don't have that, it's hard to play especially when you are going through mental and physical approaches. It's great to have those people on you and wanting you to succeed. So far here I've had a great time. These guys on this team, we're in the playoffs. We like to play hard everyday. We might not win everyday but we play hard and Manager Scar [Steve Scarsone], he beats it into us that we need to play hard everyday. You never know when your last game could be due to injury or being released or traded, so you've got to play hard everyday and have fun with it and hopefully get to the big leagues one day.

DM: What went through your mind when you got hit in the face by the pitch on July 7th at Clinton, Iowa?

MS: Nothing went through my mind then. I was scared because that could be deadly there. You could lose your life. I've never been hit in the face like that before. We were just at a ballpark where you couldn't see the ball really well. I tried to turn in. He threw a two-seam in high and tight and I lost it for a second. By the time I had seen it, it had hit me. It's definitely an experience I don't want to go through again in my life. Thank God that I was alright and didn't have anything wrong, just a lot of bleeding with stitches in my mouth, a lot of swelling, for two and a half weeks. Other than that I don't want to go through that again.

DM: How was the mental rehab from an incident like that?

MS: That was probably the hardest part of coming back. My first two or three at-bats were pretty bad. Seeing a ball come back at you at probably 90 miles per hour plus is tough, especially when you are thinking that in your last at bat you been hit in the face. It took a couple of at-bats. It is still taking time now, to be honest. Still pitchers come in high and tight, inside. You get a little nervous at times but you have got to relax and you've got to trust yourself and keep going everyday and getting better.

DM: What's your mentality at the plate?

MS: I don't think any pitcher can get me out. I just have that mindset. I think I'm better than every pitcher. Most of the time pitchers will get the hitters out but you have to have that mentality going up to the plate if you want to be successful at hitting. When I go up there I have confidence in myself, the confidence I have in myself I want my teammates to have in me. I try to show that and I try to hit every day.

DM: What are you trying to do at the plate?

MS: I'm trying to hit the ball hard. Not trying to hit it out of the ball park every time. Hitting doubles or whatever. I just try to do whatever I can do to help the team, if I have to get on-base in a certain situation I try to get on-base looking for a certain pitch at a certain time. I play hard and try to get after it and try to let it come to you. Try to score and try to win. The biggest thing is to win. The more times I'm on-base, the better chance we have to win. That's all I try to do.

DM: What do you still need to work on offense?

MS: Everyone has something to work on everyday until you get to the big leagues. Even then you still have something to work on. I have to see more pitches and get more comfortable. I need to hit the ball more consistently hard. Watch guys in the big leagues and every ball they hit is pretty much hard, so that is what you have to work on. Putting more backspin on it. I don't think I'm too far away, just have to work on something to get you better every day.

DM: What about defensively?

MS: You've got to work on range, feet. You've got to really work on things in the game with that, to be honest. When the ball gets hit, reaction, you just got to work hard everyday and play hard.

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

MS: I don't listen to an iPod. I play PSP. I don't listen to music really. I like listening to Kenny Chesney in the car.

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

MS: I'm getting my degree in criminal justice or I would have my degree in criminal justice. I don't have my minor in psychology yet, but I'd be somewhat in the law enforcement. I don't know what. Not a police officer, maybe a SWAT team, something more physical, more exciting. Maybe law enforcement but I also want to be a coach someday and hopefully for a Division One school or even higher.

DM: What do you like to do in the off-season?

MS: I hang out with my fiancée in Cincinnati. I like to go visit my family in Florida, my nieces and nephews. I love fishing. That's what I do in the off-season. I don't get to see my family and my fiancée very much, so I hang out with them and spend time with them because you don't get much time with them because in a couple of months you're back on the field.

DM: What's your off-season training like?

MS: It's a lot harder than it is right now. It's everyday. You are lifting weights and you are running. It's not much hitting and stuff like that. It is more like running and conditioning and getting stronger. You've got to be mentally and physically strong because there is a guy out there to get your job.

Q&A With A's 28th Round Pick Conner Crumbliss

David Malamut
OaklandClubhouse.com

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Conner Crumbliss, the Oakland A's 28th round pick in 2009, has been one of the most pleasant early surprises from the team's draft this year. Crumbliss was selected from a small school, but he played his first professional year like a player from a big-time program. David Malamut spoke with Crumbliss over the weekend...

In his first professional season, Conner Crumbliss was a force all over the field for the Oakland A's short-season affiliate, the Vancouver Canadians, and their Low-A affiliate, the Kane County Cougars. The Emporia State alum batted .290 with 20 extra-base hits, a .427 OBP, 13 stolen bases and an 831 OPS in 71 games. He also was a valuable player on defense, getting time in both the outfield and at second base.

David Malamut spoke with Crumbliss over the weekend about his first pro season, his adjustments to wood bats, his off-season plans, and more...

David Malamut: How do you feel?

Conner Crumbliss: I feel pretty good. I started dragging here a little bit, but I had a couple of days off when I got here to Kane County and got going with a little bit of energy, so I feel good.

DM: What was your first baseball experience?

CC: With my brothers. We played games when I was in diapers.

DM: What was it like playing at Emporia State?

CC: Kind of a small school. Good coaching staff though. It's a lot of fun and had a nice field. It was a lot of fun.

DM: What did you learn while at Emporia State?

CC: The little things about baseball, things you can't learn by someone telling you. Just picking it up as you go, the little things, when you're playing.

DM: How was reaching the finals this year?

CC: It was the most exciting thing short of being drafted. That was the best time I've ever had and I wish we could go back and play that game over.

DM: You had 12 homers one year in only 39 games. What did you do differently that year?

CC: I hate to say it, but I think it was just a little bit windier. I just kind of got a little bit lucky. I probably hit four or five that were pretty legit home runs, and then quite a few that got up in the wind a little bit.

DM: How was being scouted?

CC: You don't really hear much about it. Maybe it was different for me at a small school, but you really don't hear about people. Scouts don't come talk to you.

DM: How was draft day?

CC: For me it was laid back. I just sat around and watched the computer ticker and just chilled out at home.

DM: How about being drafted by the A's?

CC: I love it, it has been a great time so far. I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world, it's been a great time.

DM: What was Vancouver like?

CC: It was fun, I had a lot of fun there. The fans were good, the stadium is nice, and the coaching staff was great. It was a lot of fun coming here [to Kane County] and I'm glad I made the move.

DM: How was Canada?

CC: I liked Canada. I didn't like that my cell phone cost extra, the money exchange. I didn't like that, but other than that, it was great. I had a lot of fun there.

DM: How big of a difference are the wood bats for you?

CC: I had played summer ball with wood bats before, for three years. For the first few weeks after you've played with metal it takes some getting used to. It's a different weight and different feel when you hit the ball. Now I can't even remember what it was like to hit with the metal bats. It hasn't been too hard of a transition.

DM: You have played the outfield and second base. Which do you prefer and has playing both helped you in either one?

CC: I like both. I don't even care just wherever they want to put me. I don't know if it has helped me with either one. It has helped me a lot in Vancouver, especially to get into the lineup. I got about half and half playing time in the outfield and infield. It has definitely gotten me more at bats, so it has been good.

DM: How has Kane County been so far?

CC: It's been a lot of fun. They get big crowds most nights when it's not school nights. It's been a lot of fun. The people here are awesome.

DM: How do you like being a leadoff hitter?

CC: It's pretty much the only place I've ever hit in the lineup, so I guess I wouldn't know anything different but I like it. I like helping get things started most games and try to have good at-bats.

DM: As the leadoff hitter, is a walk as good as a hit for you, in your opinion, and what are you looking at when the ball comes towards the plate?

CC: Yes, definitely, because if you can get on, if you can just get to first base, you up your chances of scoring and then you can steal bases. It's just finding a way to first which is the only big thing. I try to make a little window where the ball is going to come out. I just try to watch the ball. I don't even think about it.

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

CC: Right now going back to school, trying to finish my degree. I have another year left. I'm not going back this year but I might start back up next fall. We were too late this year, especially with Instructionals, so if I don't go to Instructs next

year I will probably try to finish school then.

DM: You majored in pre-dentistry in college, were you going to become a dentist?

CC: Well that was my major when I was a freshman. I don't think they ever changed it [on my bio], but that wasn't actually my major. I majored in recreation, so it kind of changed. I fell through on the dentist stuff my freshman year, and decided I wanted to go into more fitness and health-related activities, trainer-type stuff.

DM: What do you like to do in the off-season?

CC: Just working out. Working on baseball stuff, although I just hang out a lot play some guitar, play some video games, and watch television. Just chill out.

DM: Any good with the guitar?

CC: A little bit, I won't be having any concerts anytime soon.

DM: What is your off-season training like?

CC: I don't know this year, I've only ever done it with college, so they had a set workout program for us. We will see what our strength and conditioning coach has planned out.

DM: What are your top-five artists in your iPod?

CC: Metallica, Chevelle, Three Days Grace, Breaking Benjamins. I don't know if I can get five. I like Queens of the Stone Age, that's a good fifth one.

DM: What are you working on on offense?

CC: Making less easy outs, fly balls, weak grounders. Just trying to get more line drives, and hard ground balls.

DM: On defense?

CC: In the outfield taking better routes. I haven't played much infield here, but in the infield having more sure hands and trying to get quicker at turning double plays.

DM: In college you stole a lot of bases. What are you looking for from the pitcher?

CC: I don't know because when I was in school they didn't have many guys with good pick-off moves so pretty much as soon as they started to move their bodies at all, I'd take off. Here it's a little harder a lot of times. Before the game they will have a key for you to key on, a lot of times it's his elbow or his knees or something that moves first and try to pick that up.

A Look Back at 2009

STOCKTON, Calif.--After securing their 11th California League Championship last season, the Stockton Ports team looked to defending their crown in 2009. But while their hopes were high, the Ports struggled in the first half of the season.

Stockton finished the first half of the season 25-45 (.357), which is the Ports' worst half-season record since finishing 23-47 (.329) in the second half of the 1999 season. The last time the Ports finished the first half with a winning percentage less than .400 was in 1961, when they finished 21-48 with a .304 winning percentage.

But Stockton was able to turn things around in the second half, playing over .500 and making a run for a playoff spot. The Ports were second to the San Jose Giants for a majority of the second half, but faded on their last two road trips of the season, to fall out of the playoff chase. The success in the second half could be credited to the addition of prospects from Single-A Kane County, including Steve Kleen, Grant Desme, Dusty Coleman, Anthony Capra and Ben Hornbeck.

The Ports finished the second half of the season with a 36-34 record, and a 61-79 overall record. The Ports finish the season in last place in the North Division.

The Ports finished the year third in the California League with a 4.15 team ERA and first in the league with 1,268 strikeouts. Yusuf Carter finished the year ranked among league batting leaders with a .318 average, 14 home runs and 52 RBI.

The Ports announced prior to Monday's season finale that Grant Desme had been selected as the 2009 Player of the Year. 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.

The Ports also welcomed the First and Second Round Draft picks from 2008, INF Jemile Weeks and RHP Tyson Ross. Both succeeded in Stockton, and earned promotions to Double-A Midland. Weeks had a 22-game hitting streak, the second longest in the League, to begin his season with the Ports. OF Matt Spencer and INF Alex Valdez were also both promoted to Midland in the first half of the season, finding continued success. The Ports also welcomed the Oakland A's First Round (13th overall) draft pick from 2009, INF Grant Green in the last homestand of the season. Green made his professional debut with the Ports on Wednesday, September 2.

The Ports featured several Oakland A's farm system leaders on their squad this season. Carlos Hernandez leads the organization with 15 victories-including nine with the Ports. Pedro Figueroa ended the season with 13 victories, second in the organization. Mickey Storey collected nine of his organization-leading 18 saves with the Ports this season. Three of the top five strikeout kings competed with the Ports this summer. Anthony Capra finished the 2009 campaign with 170 strikeouts, while Ben Hornbeck had 159 strikeouts and Pedro Figueroa fanned 145 batters.

Ports player of the year Grant Desme totaled 31 home runs-20 with Stockton-to lead the Oakland organization in that category. He also ranked among farm system leaders with 89 RBI and 40 stolen bases. Yusuf Carter and Steve Kleen ranked among the top 10 batters in the system, with a .318 and .312 average respectively.

With the 2009 regular season in the books, the Ports look back at some of the highlights of the season.

Walk-Off Winner- It came down to a nail-biting finish, and for the second time this season, the Ports walked off the Banner Island Ballpark diamond victorious. With two out and two on in the bottom of the ninth, OF Matt Spencer lifted the Ports to a 8-7 walk-off win against Rancho Cucamonga on Friday, May 8 with a monster shot over the Jackson Rancheria Back Porch. The Ports came back from a 6-2 deficit after five innings, and chiseled away at the Quakes' lead in the late innings before Spencer's home run buried Rancho Cucamonga, and gave Stockton their second walk-off win of the season. It was their first walk-off home run victory of the year.

No-Hitting Hernandez-In his seventh start of the season for Stockton, LHP Carlos Hernandez got the better of the Inland Empire 66ers down at Arrowhead Credit Union Park. Hernandez, on the heels of two straight losses, was in dire need of a good outing when he took the hill on Wednesday, May 12 in San Bernardino. Hernandez didn't just have a good outing--he was brilliant. Hernandez did not allow a hit in his six innings of work, striking out eight and helping the Ports to a 2-0 win. The Ports' no-hit bid ended in the eighth as reliever Justin Friend allowed a single to Steven Caseres.

Break out the Fan-LHP Ben Hornbeck headed into the game at home on Friday, May 22 as one of the best pitchers in the Oakland organization, with a 4-0 record and a 1.24 ERA in seven games with Kane County. In his debut with the Ports, Hornbeck proved that he could put up some impressive numbers in the California League as well as the Midwest League. He struck out an individual and team season-high 12 batters in 6.0 innings, and held the Visalia Rawhide to just one hit and one walk in the game. He struck out the side in two consecutive innings, and fanned eight of the last nine batters he faced.

No. 1 Pick Delivers-INF Jemile Weeks arrived in Stockton on May 27, and made his presence known immediately. Weeks, the A's 1st Round (12th overall) selection in the 2008 First-Year Player Draft, started off the season by hitting safely in each of the first 22 straight games he played in. He batted .400 (36x90) with five doubles, a triple, seven home runs and 23 RBI in that span. He posted six multi-RBI games in the streak as well. Weeks holds the longest hitting streak by a Ports player this season. He was also only one of two California Leaguers with a 20+ game hitting streak. James McOwen of High Desert compiled a 45-game hitting streak, from May 10 to July 8.

Good Luck Breaking This Record-The Stockton Ports played in the longest game in California League history-a 7-hour, 34-minute long contest, and lost to the High Desert Mavericks, 7-6 in 21 innings. The game originally began at 7:05 p.m. on Thursday, June 4 and wrapped up on Friday, June 5.

The game was the longest the Ports have played all season, in terms of both innings and duration. It was their fourth extra-innings game this season. The game had to be called just after five hours and 14 innings of play Thursday night

because of a California League rule that stipulates that no inning can be started after midnight. Play resumed at 6:05 p.m. on Friday, prior to their regularly scheduled game. The previous League record for longest game (in terms of duration) was seven hours, for a 22-inning game between Bakersfield and Visalia, which was on June 19 and 20, 1971. Visalia won, 11-9, at home in that game. That game was also suspended by umpires due to a curfew rule.

Celebrating Independence-The Ports hosted their annual Independence Day Celebration on July 3, welcoming 6,075 fans to Banner Island Ballpark. The Ports hosted a Fireworks Extravaganza that lit up the Downtown Stockton skyline following an exciting 6-2 victory against archrival San Jose on Friday, July 3. The Ports nearly matched their single game attendance record of 6,285, which was set on July 3, 2008. The Ports had some in-game fireworks as Grant Desme and Frank Martinez homered in this year's July 3 game. LHP Ben Hornbeck allowed just two hits-both singles-and two runs in 5.0 innings. He struck out six in the contest as well.

Break out the Brooms-Who doesn't love handing a rival their upcomence? The Stockton Ports were locked in a pitcher's duel with the San Jose Giants on Thursday, July 30, and tough pitching enabled the Ports to edge the Giants, 4-3 at Banner Island Ballpark. The victory sealed the sweep for the Ports, giving the Giants their first losing sweep of the season. The Giants had not been swept since dropping a three-game set at Lancaster from July 16-18, 2008. It was the second sweep of the year for the Ports. Stockton starter Carlos Hernandez had another great outing, allowing one run on four hits in 6.2 innings of work. Reliever Justin Friend picked up his fifth save of the season, knuckling down on the Giants in the ninth frame.

Welcoming 1 Millionth Fan on July 30--Randy Friend, a native of Manteca, Calif., admitted that he's never won anything-at least before becoming the one millionth fan to enter the gates of Banner Island Ballpark. But Friend certainly walked away from the gates with more than a Section 112 ticket to the Thursday, July 30 Ports game against the San Jose Giants. The Ports put together a gift basket for the one millionth fan, including two tickets to Las Vegas, courtesy of Allegiant Air, an autographed 2009 Ports team baseball, CDs from Bob Dylan, John Mellencamp and Willie Nelson, and much more.

"This accomplishment definitively shows the loyalty of Ports fans and reflects the family-fun atmosphere we produce here at Banner Island Ballpark," said Ports President and General Manager Pat Filippone. "We're truly excited to celebrate this accomplishment as we head into the final stretch of the season."

Close to Perfect-July 31 belonged to Ports starter Daniel Haigwood. In his second start since being added to the Stockton roster from Double-A Midland, the southpaw retired the first 19 batters he faced, taking him one out into the seventh. Haigwood's bid for perfection was broken up by a solo home run by Modesto Nuts shortstop Hector Gomez, a hit that proved to be the only blemish on the night for both Haigwood and Derrick Gordon, who tossed a perfect final two innings to end the ballgame. Stockton's offense came through with plenty of support as the Boys of Banner Island earned their fourth straight win, beating the Nuts by a final of 7-1 on Friday, July 31.

Piling on the Ks-The Stockton pitchers put forth a tremendous effort, striking out 22 Lake Elsinore batters as the Ports came from behind to win, 6-5 in 10 innings on August 4 at Banner Island Ballpark. The 22 strikeouts marked a new season-high for the Ports, and Stockton pitchers came within two strikeouts of matching a California League record (22) for most strikeouts in a nine-inning game. Starter Anthony Capra fanned nine in 4.2 innings, while Derrick Gordon struck out six, Nick Walters added four strikeouts, and winning pitcher Mickey Storey collected four strikeouts in the contest. The Ports totaled 14 hits in the game, and Wichita State product Dusty Coleman secured the victory for Stockton with the game-winning RBI single in the tenth inning.

Gordon Does it All--In a game that went 14 innings and featured 46 combined strikeouts, Ports reliever Derrick Gordon (5-5) delivered the clutch game-winning hit with two outs in the bottom of the 14th, and was also the game's winning pitcher in Stockton's epic 2-1 win over the Bakersfield Blaze. With two down in the 14th inning, Grant Desme reached on a single to center and subsequently stole second, getting into scoring position for Gordon who'd just pitched a perfect 13th inning. Gordon, on a 2-1 pitch, hit a ball into the gap in right-center field for a double, scoring Desme and putting the Ports up 2-1. It was Gordon's first professional hit, and ultimately one that won the game for both himself and the team. Stockton and Bakersfield combined for 46 strikeouts in the game, falling seven shy of matching a Cal-League record for an extra-inning game set on August 31, 1966 in a game between Lodi and Reno, a game that went 23 innings. Both teams set season-high totals in strikeouts. Every pitcher in the game had at least one strikeout.

Green Makes Pro Debut--The Port totaled just five hits in the contest, including a single by designated hitter Grant Green. Green, the Oakland A's First Round draft pick (13th overall) from the 2009 First Year-Player Draft, made his professional debut on Wednesday night with the Stockton Ports. The University of Southern California product was activated prior to the game on Wednesday. Green struck out in his first at-bat in the second frame and singled in the fifth inning. He finished Wednesday's game 1-for-4.

Oakland A's Q&A: Steve Kleen, UTL

Melissa Lockard
OaklandClubhouse.com

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If there was a "Comeback Player of the Year" vote for Oakland A's minor leaguers, Steve Kleen would be near the top of that list for 2009. After missing all of last season with injury, Kleen bounced back with a vengeance, appearing in all 140 games and hitting .312 with 15 homers, 85 RBIs and an 856 OPS for Kane County and Stockton. We spoke with Kleen about his season and more...

It has been a terrific year both on and off the field for [Steve Kleen](#). On the field, Kleen hit .312 and played in every game this season for Low-A Kane County and High-A Stockton. Off the field, Kleen saw his efforts to help out in the community rewarded by the Stockton Ports when he was honored with the Ports' inaugural [Dallas Braden](#) Community Award. These achievements were made even more sweet for Kleen since they came a season after he missed the entire year with a shoulder injury.

Kleen was an 11th round pick by the A's in 2005, and he was moving steadily through the Oakland organization before the injury cost him the 2008 season. In 2006, Kleen hit .281 in 126 games for Kane County. The [Pepperdine](#) alum followed that season by hitting .272 with the Ports in 2007. A torn labrum stopped that progress in its tracks in 2008, as he had off-season surgery that cost him the season.

Kleen had to reprove himself in spring training and he earned a spot on the Kane County Opening Day roster. He spent exactly half of the season with the Cougars, batting .282 with eight homers in 70 games. Kleen earned a spot in the Midwest League All-Star game and a post-All-Star game promotion to Stockton. With the Ports, Kleen turned it up a notch, batting .342 with seven homers, a .430 OBP and a 917 OPS in 70 games. Kleen set career-highs in nearly every offensive category in 2009.

We caught-up with Kleen in Stockton over the Labor Day weekend to discuss his charity work and his comeback season...

OaklandClubhouse: Congratulations on winning the Dallas Braden Community award. Can you tell me a little bit about the charity you are setting up [on Saturday before the game]?

Steve Kleen: Tonight I was looking to set-up something to show our support for our chaplains. They have been a big part of our team this year. They have helped lead a Bible study during the week and are here on Sundays. They come up here from Manteca and have been a real source of encouragement for a lot of the guys on the team through their ministry. They do it all just because they want to be an encouragement and a blessing to us. I want to give back to them, so we are selling some autographed gear and hopefully we will raise a little bit of money to help them with their ministry.

OC: You've had a great season this year after missing all of last season. What was it like to get back on the field this season after missing the year?

SK: I had a lot of anxiety coming into spring training because I hadn't played in so long. I knew I was coming back to a really high level of baseball. I felt confident that I could perform and it was just a matter of working those butterflies out of my stomach. Once that went away, I was surprised with how well I was prepared. Physically, I came back stronger and mentally it was a huge adjustment having the game taken away from me for a little while and not being able to play. I was hungry to come back and prove that I could still play.

OC: It was a shoulder injury, right?

SK: Right.

OC: How did it happen?

SK: I think it was just a throwing injury. It was a torn labrum. It was a long recovery, a big surgery. It's great to finally play a season healthy.

OC: Had it been bothering you for awhile?

SK: Yeah, it was sore for most of the 2007 season. But it wasn't until the very end of the season that it turned into pain and I knew I had to get it checked.

OC: You were here [in Stockton] in 2007 and now you are back here again. Has there been a difference in the way that

you have been able to approach the California League this time around?

SK: Yeah, I think the biggest thing is that I have been really trusting God with my career. Before I was trying to do it all on my own strength and I was pressing mentally. Baseball is such a game of failure that you have to be able to bounce back from a poor performance because you play everyday. I was having a hard time in '07 handling failure. This year, if I have a bad game, I come back the next day with a mentality that I am going to succeed today.

OC: You've played a little third base in addition to your customary first base this season. Has that been comfortable for you, or it is still a learning process?

SK: I feel comfortable. I feel like I can play any corner position – left field, right field, third, first. They've played me a lot at first and I have played every game this year. I think I've played about five games at third. I felt fine over there. I felt comfortable. I know that for me, personally, it will be better to play more positions. It gives me more options and first base is such a tough position. You really have to put up ridiculous offensive numbers. I think I am capable enough – I'm agile enough and I have a good enough arm – that I can play any of the corner positions.

OC: You did some pitching in college. Do you miss that at all or is that something that you have put behind you?

SK: Actually, I haven't missed it one bit. Especially in pro ball, we play everyday and especially as a position player, you are in the line-up, you are getting at-bats and you really feel like an athlete. Pitchers, it's just a lot of time waiting. If you have a bad performance, you have to wait days sometimes before your next chance. I like the position player part of it, being able to play defense, offense, run the bases. Just to be a part of the game everyday.

OC: How do you approach each at-bat? Are you looking early in the count to take an advantage of a mistake or are you trying to see a lot of pitches?

SK: I am just trying to hit a good pitch. I'm not looking to swing at a pitcher's pitch and I am looking to get a pitch where I can get the barrel of the bat on the ball and hit it hard somewhere. I am more of a line-drive hitter, so most of the time I am looking to hit singles, doubles, that sort of thing.

OC: You were a part of the Midwest League All-Star game. What was that experience like for you?

SK: That was an awesome experience. I got to participate in the Home Run Derby. Then I played in the game and hit a home run in the All-Star Game. It was just really exciting to be surrounded by guys that I know are on-track to be in the big leagues and feel like I could compete at that level. It was an honor.

OC: You had a '07 Stockton teammate, Tom Everidge, make it to the big leagues this season. Is it inspirational to see guys who you were teammates with and maybe played a few levels with make it to the big leagues?

SK: I was so happy for Tommy. He has done great and he deserved it. I was so excited to see him get that opportunity. For me personally, it is an encouragement to know that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. I just have to continue to work hard and show up everyday and continue to get better. Hopefully, I'll get the chance as well.

OC: Do you have any off-season plans now that you are healthy and don't have to go to rehab or PT everyday?

SK: The main thing is to get some relaxation and prepare for next season and spend some time with my wife.

OC: Do you feel like your body has held up well this season, or was it a shock to come back to the 140 game schedule?

SK: I was surprised with how well I held up. You get those little bumps and bruises here and there. For some reason, I tend to get hit by pitches more than anyone else, it seems like. You've just got to play through those little things. Without a major injury, I was surprised with how easily my body handled this season.