

## A's News Clips, Friday, September 18, 2009

### A's create their own electricity

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

The ingredients were there for the A's to mail one in Thursday night.

It was the first game back from a 6-2 road trip that featured all eight games against American League playoff hopefuls.

The 61-84 Cleveland Indians arrived at Oakland Coliseum to open a four-game series.

And a paltry announced crowd of 10,873 (maybe half of which actually showed) hardly provided an electric atmosphere.

But self-motivation hasn't been a problem for the A's in September, as their 5-2 victory over the Indians demonstrated.

It was a well-rounded performance that ran the A's win streak to four games, gave them their ninth win in 11 games and pushed their September record to 10-5.

The A's are 31-29 since the All-Star break, and though they're playing without the pressure of a pennant race, there's something to be said for finishing strong when there's no tangible reward at the finish line.

"I don't think it makes any difference to us," A's manager Bob Geren said. "We just want to win. We have our own goals. We're not going to make the playoffs obviously, but I like what we're doing. It's a lot of fun."

Leadoff man Adam Kennedy was instrumental in both A's scoring rallies.

He led off the bottom of the first with a double and eventually scored on Ryan Sweeney's ground out.

Kennedy doubled again in the third to score Cliff Pennington. After Sweeney walked with one out, Kurt Suzuki drove an 0-2 fastball from Justin Masterson

(4-8) for a three-run homer, giving the A's a 5-0 lead.

Suzuki's three RBI give him 78 for the season, which ties the RBI total of the Philadelphia A's Frankie Hayes in 1944.

The significance?

Hayes is the only catcher in franchise history to lead the team in RBI for a season. Suzuki leads the A's second-best RBI man, Jack Cust, by 16 with 16 games left, so Suzuki seems assured of becoming the second catcher to accomplish the feat.

The most RBI in a season by an Oakland catcher came in 1996, when Terry Steinbach had 100.

Rookie Clayton Mortensen (2-2) went five innings in his second consecutive winning start, allowing two runs and four hits.

"I tried to attack hitters," Mortensen said. "I kept falling behind, but I kept us in the game, and that's all that matters really."

After Mortensen left, relievers Brad Kilby, Craig Breslow, Michael Wuertz and Andrew Bailey allowed just two hits over four combined shutout innings.

Bailey converted his 25th save of the season and his 20th straight save opportunity, both ongoing Oakland rookie records.

Wuertz said there's plenty for the A's to play for despite being out of postseason contention.

"Whether it be position players or pitchers, it's time to open the eyes of the front office," Wuertz said.

## **A's notebook: Shoulder injury shuts down rookie Mazzaro for the season**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Shoulder tendinitis shuts down rookie Mazzaro

A's right-hander Vin Mazzaro enjoyed his first exposure to the major leagues this season, but he could have done without another eye opener: his first significant injury.

The A's announced Wednesday that Mazzaro will miss the rest of the season with right shoulder tendinitis. That has the rookie turning his attention to 2010 sooner than he hoped.

"I want to be 100 percent, feeling nothing, and knowing I don't have to cut back on some things and baby it," he said before Thursday's series opener against Cleveland. ... (The goal) is to get to where I was to start the season and be ready for next season."

The A's expect Mazzaro, who turns 23 on Sept. 27, to be completely healthy by spring training.

His rookie season wound up being a mixed bag. He dazzled with two scoreless outings after his June 2 promotion but was 2-9 with a 6.26 ERA in 15 starts after that.

Still, Mazzaro would seem to figure prominently in next year's rotation. He's tinkered with some mechanical adjustments throughout the season and wants them ironed out by next year.

"I need to slow myself down in the windup," Mazzaro said.

Manager Bob Geren said Brett Tomko also could miss the rest of the season with nerve irritation in his elbow area. Dana Eveland will start Sunday in Tomko's place, with Edgar Gonzalez going Monday against the Texas Rangers.

## **Showdown fit for the minors**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Many of the names in Thursday night's game between the A's and the Indians appeared more suited to a Triple-A playoff showdown.

Two sub-.470 clubs got to see glimpses of their future, with late-season fill-in Clayton Mortensen pitching well again for Oakland in a 5-2 victory over Cleveland.

The A's mostly young club is playing some of its best baseball of the season. Since the break, Oakland is 31-29, and manager Bob Geren said that the team's goal is to better last year's 75-86 record. The A's are 68-78 after Thursday's win.

Because of Vin Mazzaro's shoulder tendinitis, Mortensen is getting an extended look at the big-league level, and he has put together two decent starts in a row, allowing three runs in nine innings. The right-hander, acquired in the Matt Holliday deal in July, gave up 14 runs in his first two starts for Oakland in a span of seven innings.

"I feel a lot more confident, a lot better on the mound," Mortensen said. "Not so much being intimidated by the other guys."

A's pitchers have given up three runs in the past four games, all Oakland victories.

On Thursday, the Indians recorded one infield single through the first four innings, while drawing three walks. Mortensen recorded strikeouts in key situations, mostly using changeups and sliders. He got Luis Valbuena with two on and one out in the second and Trevor Crowe with the bases loaded the same inning. In the third, with a man on, Mortensen ended the inning by striking out Jhonny Peralta.

In the fourth, Lou Marson - picked up in the Cliff Lee trade with Philadelphia in July - led off with a single, and Crowe sent him in with a triple to right. Crowe came in on a groundout by September-call-up Michael Brantley.

The A's bullpen hadn't allowed a run in 11 innings coming into Thursday and Brad Kilby (one inning), Craig Breslow (1 1/3 innings), Michael Wuertz (2/3 of an inning) and Andrew Bailey (one inning) extended that to 15 innings. Wuertz took over with a man on in the eighth and walked Peralta, then struck out Travis Hafner and Matt LaPorta.

Bailey struck out the side in the ninth and extended his Oakland rookie record for saves to 25. He's converted 20 in a row, the second longest current streak in the league behind Mariano Rivera's 36 for the Yankees.

Oakland third baseman Adam Kennedy hit a first-pitch double leading off the first, and he went to third on a grounder and scored on another, by Ryan Sweeney.

After Cliff Pennington walked in the third, Kennedy smoked another first-pitch double, sending Pennington in. With one out, Sweeney walked, and Kurt Suzuki crushed an 0-2 fastball from Justin Masterson off the concrete above the high wall in left center. Masterson had struck out Suzuki with the same pitch in the first inning, but this sinker was "a foot higher," Geren estimated.

Though Suzuki has tailed off recently average-wise, hitting .219 over his last 17 games, he has driven in 21 runs in that stretch. Overall, Suzuki has a team-leading 78 RBIs. The only catcher in franchise history to lead the team in RBIs was Frankie Hayes, who had 78 for Philadelphia in 1944.

## **Rookie Mazzaro done for the year**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland returned from a road trip down two starters and on Thursday, manager **Bob Geren** made it official: **Vin Mazzaro** will not pitch again this season because of tendinitis in his right shoulder.

**Brett Tomko** also might be shut down because of a nerve problem in his right arm, but a final decision has not been made, according to Geren, who said there remains a chance that Tomko will be on the mound again before the end of the season.

Tomko's nerve problem extends the length of his arm, with much of the discomfort in his forearm. He is not with the team this weekend, returning to San Diego because his wife is scheduled to deliver twins today. Tomko threw 114 pitches Monday in a shutout at Texas.

Left-hander **Dana Eveland** will take Tomko's spot Sunday against Cleveland. Geren said he will stick with a six-man rotation, so **Clayton Mortensen**, Thursday night's starter, is likely to remain in the place left open by Mazzaro.

Mazzaro, 22, went 4-9 with a 5.32 ERA in 17 starts this year as a rookie. He started strong, working 132/3 scoreless innings and allowing eight hits his first two starts, and he finished well, not allowing more than three runs in his final five starts after slowing his stride to keep his arm from lagging in his delivery. That helped his two-seam fastball and his changeup.

"I thought it was pretty good," Mazzaro said of his season. "I have some things to work on and I learned a lot of things."

**Briefly:** Triple-A Sacramento returns home tonight down 2-0 in the Pacific Coast League championship series, and must beat Memphis three games in a row to win the PCL title for the third consecutive year. Tonight's game is at 7:05 p.m. ... Double-A Midland is tied with Northwest Arkansas at one game apiece in the best-of-five Texas League championship series.

## **A's leading off**

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

**Moving in:** It was much remarked Thursday that Eric Munson has been assigned Eric Chavez's locker. "I'm going to have to call Eric and have him move his boxes so I have more room," the catcher said with a laugh. He and Chavez are close friends from high school.

## **Hint of hope amid A's despair?**

Ray Ratto, Chronicle Staff Writer

By now, all but the diehardenest of diehards have crowded the A's out of their wonder-how-they're-doing list, and we say that based only in part on Thursday night's crowd of zero, give or take a couple thousand.

Truth is, though, they are playing better baseball this month than in any of the past five - just enough, perhaps, to hang their hats on something good come winter.

We say perhaps, of course, because September is a small sample size for a team that's been out of contention since June. I mean, knocking the Texas Rangers out of the playoff race is nice and all, but it's not really the sort of thing you put on the front of the media guide: "A's 2010: We Eliminated a Team Whose Owner Is Broke!"

But when deferred hope is all you've got, you cling to it. The 49ers are using Mike Singletary's 5-4 record last year as the springboard for their newfound belief. The Raiders, on Tom Cable's 2-1 finish. The Sharks, on Dany Heatley. The Warriors, on a well-placed meteor.

The A's, though, have bounced between bereft and gormless for most of the season, so winning nine of 11 and 25 of the prior 43 might be a measure of good things coming around the corner. If, that is, you're not particular how distant that corner is.

"We've been playing better, winning some games here," general manager Bill Beane said (his hair is now sufficiently gray for the Billy thing to be over and done with), "but even now, with a lot of guys we're counting on not here yet, I don't

think that I would be too quick to judge what this would mean for next spring. I mean, we're pleased that we're playing well and all, but this is what we have to do - be willing to go through the pain you have to go through as a rebuilding club."

Well, that's not exactly the damn-the-gunfire-we-can-take-the-hill speech one would expect from a GM whose year has largely been lost from the start. But Beane's circumspection is frankly the least he can do, given the enormous downer the year has been, and how long ago the playoff run of '06 seems.

He has found reason to like his future with Rajai Davis leading off and playing in center field (hitting .347 since the All-Star break), and he is cozying up to Ryan Sweeney as the every-day right fielder. He also spoke in glowing terms about shortstop Cliff Pennington, although Beane will on occasion talk up one of his own in hopes that he might convince someone to make him one of theirs.

And then there is the litany of young 'uns (Brett Wallace, Chris Carter, Adrian Cardenas) with whom the A's hope to re-create the good old days at some as-yet-unspecified time. None are in Oakland now, because Beane doesn't want to start any individual clocks until they make their 40-man roster decisions this offseason.

What encouragement there is, then, comes from the fact that the A's didn't do what teams in their position typically do - give it the old junior college try. They've lost only two series in the last month (to the Yankees and Mariners), and while it only lifted them from 11th to 10th overall, at least they didn't go all Nationals or Mets or Pirates.

And trust us, they could have. Indeed, based on word of mouth alone, you'd think they had. Their breathtaking anonymity is often used as an explanation for their free-falling attendance (Thursday's announced crowd of 10,873 was actually total limbs, not fully-formed people), but this is also an area that can sense pretty quickly when something isn't going to happen, and heads without much provocation for something that is.

Instead, they have snatched mediocrity from the jaws of awfulness, and given how eagerly other Bay Area fan bases cling to shards of hope, A's fans at least have this - a largely young team that got its brains kicked in early, but less often as the year went on, to the point where their record (31-29) is virtually the same as San Francisco's (30-28) since the All-Star break.

How this translates next spring remains a very open question, and wise people would do well not to inflate their dreams. Beane is hesitant when asked if this burst of better-than-average is a harbinger of things to come, as well he should be.

Nevertheless, the A's are easing toward "intriguing" after nearly four months of firm "who gives a damn?" and while almost nobody seems to be terribly inspired by this news, it may mean that their road back to watchability is not as long as we've led ourselves to believe.

It's not short, mind you. Just short-er.

## **Suzuki, Kennedy power A's over Tribe**

## **Rookie Mortensen earns second big league victory**

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The A's brought some of their mojo home after their best road trip of the year.

They picked up Thursday night at the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum against Cleveland where they left off Wednesday at Arlington, Texas, against the Rangers.

The A's kicked off an eight-game homestand with a 5-2 victory over the Indians. They won their fourth straight game, their second longest streak of the season. Only their seven-game streak from June 2-8 is longer.

The A's may have been eliminated from playoff contention, but they're playing as if they're in the middle of a pennant race. They went 6-2 on their road trip, splitting a pair with the White Sox, taking two of three from the Twins and then sweeping three games from the Rangers. They outscored the Rangers, 19-1.

"It's great," said A's catcher Kurt Suzuki, who slugged a three-run homer in the third inning. "We're having fun, and that's the main thing. And it's showing. On the field we're loose, relaxed, having fun, going out there and just playing the game of baseball.

"We're pretty much out of it, but to be coming to the park every day playing hard and going out and winning as many games as we can to kind of build on next year, it's a good feeling to win games."

In the opener of a four-game series, A's rookie pitcher Clayton Mortensen gave up just two runs over five innings to earn his second Major League win.

Third baseman Adam Kennedy hit a pair of leadoff doubles, sparking rallies in the first and third. Andrew Bailey picked up his 25th save, striking out three in the ninth and adding to his A's rookie record.

Mortensen, who came to the Oakland from St. Louis on July 24 in the Matt Holliday trade, won back-to-back starts and improved to 2-2. He struck out four, walked three and gave up four hits.

"I felt good," Mortensen said. "Definitely a little upset I didn't do a lot better than that. I felt good out on the mound, though, trying to attack hitters. I kept falling behind, but I kept us in the game and that's all that matters."

Mortensen pitched out of a two-out, bases-loaded jam in the second after he walked two batters and gave up a single to Lou Marson. He struck out Trevor Crowe swinging to end the inning. In the third with two outs and Shin-Soo Choo on first, Mortensen fanned Jhonny Peralta swinging on an offspeed pitch.

Mortensen didn't give up a run until the fifth when the Indians scored twice. Marson led off with a single and Crowe tripled him home. Then Crowe scored on Michael Brantley's ground out, cutting the A's lead to 5-2.

Mortensen has made tremendous progress since his debut as a starter for the A's on Aug. 8, after being called up from Triple-A Sacramento. Kansas City hammered him for eight hits and eight runs in four innings. The A's immediately sent him down, but they recalled him Sept. 4.

In his second start, Mortensen gave up four runs and six hits in seven innings against Seattle. Then on Sept. 11, in his first big league win, he allowed just one run and six hits over six innings against the Twins.

"I feel a lot more confident, a lot better out on the mound than I did that very first start," Mortensen said. "Not so much being intimidated by the other guys that I'm facing. I just definitely feel more comfortable on the mound, more confident in my stuff."

The A's hitters wasted no time giving Mortensen a cushion. Kennedy led off the game with a double, one-hopping his shot off the right-field wall. He moved to third on Rajai Davis' ground out and scored on Ryan Sweeney's dribbler to first.

In the third, it was déjà vu all over again. Kennedy led off the inning with another double to right off Indians starter Justin Masterson. After Davis struck out, Sweeney walked, setting the stage for Suzuki.

Suzuki fell behind 0-2. No problem. He unloaded a three-run homer to left-center, just right of the 388-foot mark. The blast was Suzuki's 13th of the season, six more than he had all last year.

"I kind of hung a sinker to Suzuki that he hit out," Masterson said. "On 0-2, he got one that stands out in the middle of the plate and says, 'Hit me over the fence'. So he did what he was supposed to do."

After going 6-2 against a trio of teams with playoff hopes, the A's did what they're supposed to do against the struggling Indians. A's manager Bob Geren said beating Cleveland felt just as good as any of the other recent wins.

"We just want to win," Geren said. "We're not going to make the playoffs, obviously, but we have our own goals and desires each day. I like what we're doing. It's a lot of fun."

## **Powell broadening his talent and utility**

### **Oakland (68-78) vs. Cleveland (61-85), 7:05 p.m. PT**

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A's rookie Landon Powell's first love in baseball is catching. But if it helps him get in the lineup, he's willing to learn to love playing first base and taking cuts as a designated hitter, too.

"As a competitive person all you want to do is just try to get in the lineup, try to help the team," Powell said before Thursday night's game against Cleveland. "I'm going to do whatever I can do to help the team and try to get in there and establish myself as a player."

Powell started at designated hitter against the Indians, hitting fifth in the lineup, directly behind A's catcher Kurt Suzuki. Powell was taken in the first round of the 2004 First-Year Player Draft, one round ahead of Suzuki, but Suzuki got to the big leagues first and has a hammerlock on the starting job.

"Kurt's a great player," Powell said. "I know he's going to be in there. I just hope that I can prove good enough to help the team and get my bat in the lineup however we can."

"I'm going to take a lot of ground balls at first this offseason. I'm going to work on DH-ing and hitting, and I'm still going to work on catching because I still feel my future is catching in this game, whether it's with the A's or another team."

Powell has started 27 games at catcher, four at first base and three at designated hitter this year. Going into Thursday night's game, he had only 123 at-bats in 40 total games, but he has definitely taken advantage of his opportunities.

He had 29 RBIs, the second-best single-season total by a player in Oakland history with fewer than 50 games. In 1978, Rico Carty had 31 RBIs in 41 games for the A's.

Powell has shown an uncanny knack for producing with runners on base. In his first Major League at-bat, he drilled a two-run double against the Mariners. Before Thursday, he was hitting .306 (11 for 36) with runners in scoring position. He was even better with the bases loaded, hitting .429 (3 for 7) with a double, home run and 10 RBIs.

"As a rookie, bench player and backup catcher and earlier in the year hitting lower in the order, I know the pitchers are going to come after me pretty good," said Powell, who had a rough Thursday night, going hitless in four at-bats. "They're going to throw me a lot of fastballs and try to get ahead."

"In the Minor Leagues I walked a ton every year. Up here that's not the kind of hitter I can be in my role. They're going to challenge me."

### **Pitching matchup**

#### **OAK: LHP Brett Anderson (9-10, 4.37 ERA)**

In his past two starts, Anderson has picked up back-to-back wins for the third time this season. The lefty pitched seven strong innings in a winning effort against Minnesota last Saturday, allowing just two runs on five hits while collecting four strikeouts. It was the fewest hits Anderson had allowed since July 29, when he gave up just four to Boston. Anderson also did not surrender a walk on Saturday -- the first time in 10 starts he did not allow a free pass. He'll be facing Cleveland for the first time in his career.

#### **CLE: LHP David Huff (10-7, 6.14 ERA)**




Huff, who joined the Indians' rotation in mid-May, became the club's first 10-game winner this season when he turned in six innings against the Royals on Sept. 12, allowing three runs on seven hits with a walk and six strikeouts. Huff has won five of his last six starts. He's shown improved command and aggressiveness of late, as his rookie season winds to a close.

### **Tidbits**

The versatile Ryan Sweeney started in left field, instead of his usual right, and hit third in the lineup. He went 0-for-2, snapping his seven-game hitting streak, with one RBI and two walks. "He's a tough out right now," A's manager Bob Geren said before the game. "There's not one way you can pitch him any more." ... Geren said rookie pitcher Trevor Cahill made his best start of the year Wednesday against Texas. He pitched seven shutout innings, allowing just one hit and striking out seven. "All the way around I'd say yes," Geren said. "He's been working on his slider and changeup and both of them were significantly [improved]. An improved slider is going to increase his strikeouts." ... Reliever Jay

Marshall wasn't available Thursday night because of a sore shoulder. ... Andrew Bailey's 25th save tied Jorge Julio (Baltimore, 2002) for seventh most ever by an American League rookie. He has converted 20 straight save opportunities, one shy of tying Huston Street, Dennis Eckersley and Mudcat Grant for the second most in Oakland history. Eckersley has the record of 40 straight. ... Adam Kennedy tied a career high with two doubles. He's done it 18 times overall and three times this year.

### **Up next**

- Saturday: Athletics (Gio Gonzalez, 5-6, 6.31) vs. Indians (Jeremy Sowers, 6-9, 4.49), 1:05 p.m. PT 
- Sunday: Athletics (Dana Eveland, 1-3, 7.26) vs. Indians (Fausto Carmona, 3-11, 6.58), 1:05 p.m. PT 
- Monday: Athletics (Dana Eveland, 1-3, 7.26) vs. Rangers (Kevin Millwood, 10-10, 3.94), 7:05 p.m. PT 

## **Shoulder tendinitis ends Mazzaro's year**

### **Tomko out with right arm issue, may not pitch again this season**

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Rookie pitcher Vin Mazzaro's season is over and veteran starter Brett Tomko has probably thrown his last pitch this year, as well, A's manager Bob Geren said before Thursday night's game against Cleveland.

Mazzaro has right shoulder tendinitis and hasn't pitched since Aug. 29, when he threw five innings against the Angels. Tomko has a nerve problem in his right arm. Dana Eveland will take Tomko's place in the rotation on Sunday against Cleveland with Edgar Gonzalez starting Monday against Texas.

According to Geren, Mazzaro will receive treatment but won't throw at all the rest of the season. The A's, he said, will "be conservative with him when he starts his throwing program" in the offseason.

"We all feel he'll be feeling great, he'll have a solid throwing program this winter and he'll be ready to go in the spring," Geren said.

Mazzaro won his first two games after being called up in June from Triple-A Sacramento. He beat the White Sox and Orioles and didn't allow an earned run in 13 2/3 innings. After that, he lost eight times before winning again on Aug. 7.

"It's not fun being hurt," Mazzaro said. "This is the first time I've missed a start since I started [pitching]."

Mazzaro said his goal is to "get to where I was to start the season and be ready for next season."

Mazzaro finished his rookie year 4-9 with a 5.32 ERA in 17 starts and 91 1/3 innings.

"He showed a lot of ability, had some great games at times, had a few struggles," Geren said. "Overall, a good learning experience. He's a better pitcher now than when the season started and he's going to be better for it next year."

Tomko has been much better than expected since coming to the A's after being waived by the Yankees. Tomko is 4-1 with a 2.95 ERA with the Athletics. He threw a five-hit shutout Wednesday against Texas, striking out three and walking none.

"He pitched great," Geren said of Tomko, "especially this last game."

Geren said there is a "slight chance" that Tomko could pitch again this season.

Tomko was not at Thursday night's game. He was with his wife, Linda, who is pregnant with twins.



## **Get to know: Memorable season for A's closer Bailey**

**By Cory Francer, USA TODAY**

Andrew Bailey was a starter in the minor leagues, but control problems got him sent to the bullpen last season.

That's where he has made an easy transition into the majors.

Bailey, 25, made the Oakland Athletics out of spring training and earned the closer's job by early June. In July, he was the only selected to the 2009 All-Star Game.

Bailey (6-3, 1.98 ERA, 24 saves in 28 chances through Sept. 16) caught up with Sports Weekly's Cory Francer last week.

### **On my iPod**

Buckcherry and Incubus. For a game, Metallica. More rock than anything, with some country mixed in every once in a while.

### **Xbox or PlayStation?**

Xbox. I like Call of Duty.

### **DVD I can't live without**

*Forgetting Sarah Marshall.*

### **Favorite major league ballpark**

Fenway Park. The atmosphere and history there is unbelievable.

### **My "welcome to the big leagues" moment**

Just seeing all the people in the stands every night. Running in from the bullpen at Yankee Stadium was pretty incredible, going crowd. ... Opening day we were in Anaheim. It was probably the longest run of my life, running out to the mound. That's definitely experience so far.

### **What I like most about playing in Oakland**

I love the city. It's so close to San Francisco and the Bay. It's my first time out in California, living in that area. I think the weather fluctuates all the time.

### **What was it like to meet President Obama at the All-Star Game?**

He was walking around and introduced himself. He knew my story a little bit, being a rookie. It was a once in a lifetime experience.

### **Hobbies of choice**

Golfing, playing cards, hanging out, watching movies, playing video games.

### **One thing fans don't know about me**

I'm more outgoing and carefree than they might think. The way I prepare myself to get ready for games is to just go with the flow.

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## **7 QUESTIONS**

### **1 —What was it like to be the only rookie All-Star?**

It was something I'll never forget, just being able to represent my teammates and the Oakland A's.

### **2 —What has been one of the biggest challenges of your rookie season?**

Just trying to stick to the way you are as a pitcher — throwing strikes and getting ahead of batters; not looking at the name on remembering that you're there too and you belong. Growing up, you watch all these guys on TV — you have to remember when Jeter or 'Big Papi' you have to get him out and get back to your job.

### **3 —What has it been like to have two teammates from your home state of New Jersey? (Pitcher Vin Mazzaro and out**

It's pretty cool to reminisce about the old times back on the East Coast. During the offseason, maybe we'll get to hang out a couple have been close for the past couple years. It's pretty cool to kick back and talk about East Coast things rather than all the West

### **4 —Any preference between the East Coast and West Coast?**

Not really. Eventually the East Coast would be the way I'd go.

### **5 —Oakland is known to have some pretty wild fans. Is there anything crazy you've seen in the stands?**

We have some pretty good fans that are there every game. Banjo guy plays all the time. We have some die-hards, and it's cool every game.

### **6 —The A's are one of the youngest teams in the majors. What has it been like to have players in a similar situation**

It's pretty cool because you get to experience each other's first wins, first hits and first homers. To be able to experience that to core. We're excited for the next couple years here.

### **7 —What are your baseball memories from when you were a kid?**

I grew up a (Philadelphia) Phillies fan. I used to go to the old Vet (Veterans Stadium) and hang out with the Phillie Phanatic. I'd autographs.

## **2009 A's In Review: Q&A With Farhan Zaidi, P3**

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Melissa Lockard  
OaklandClubhouse.com

Sep 18, 2009

We finish our three-part conversation with Oakland A's Director of Baseball Operations Farhan Zaidi with a discussion of the progress of a number of young A's players, including Cliff Pennington, Daric Barton and Landon Powell, as well as the role of Nomar Garciaparra and Zaidi's evaluation of the A's coaching staff...

**For part one of this interview, please click [here](#) and part two, please click [here](#).**

*OaklandClubhouse: A couple of young players who are up in Oakland right now getting a chance to play are [Daric Barton](#) and [Cliff Pennington](#). Obviously it has been a weird last couple of years for them from a development perspective. How do you feel about both of them at this point?*

**Farhan Zaidi:** It's nice that they are getting a chance to play everyday and play for a team that is playing winning baseball. Ultimately, their performance and their numbers are things that we evaluate very closely, but I like the fact that these guys are playing everyday and are contributing in a number of different ways with their offense and with their defense and, particularly in Cliff's case, with their base-running. And I like that they are playing for a baseball team that is playing over .500 and that's won some series against some pretty good teams recently. That is the most encouraging thing for us, really. To have these young guys contributing to winning, above everything, is what we want.

Certainly their statistics are impressive, as well. Daric, since coming up this time, has hit probably about as consistently well as he has at any point since his call-up in 2007, so that is certainly encouraging. Cliff really struggled when he first came up in 2008, but when you look at his numbers in September last year, they are actually pretty good. He had a good spring training and I think with his performance in the minor leagues over the past two years, he really earned a shot up here. I think we are a little bit surprised about the power and the four homers that he has hit, but he is playing good

defense and stealing bases and he is hitting for a solid average and those are all things we expected from him. Ultimately, the bottom-line for us is that they are getting to play everyday and they are just playing good, all-around baseball and they are helping the team win games.

*OC: For guys like Pennington and Barton, are their performances right now what you are going to use to evaluate what positions you need to fill in the off-season?*

**FZ:** The off-season and the things that transpire in the off-season are really functions of the opportunities that present themselves. It's really hard to go into the off-season saying, 'we are going to find a new starter at positions X and Y and we are going to sign two starting pitchers and a left-handed reliever' because you don't know which players are going to be available [via free agency], how much they are going to cost, who might become available in trades, and in trades that you might want to make, what kind of players you might have to give up to get the players you have targeted. That being the case, there are just so many variables that it is really hard to go into the off-season saying 'these are the five positions that we are going to fill.'

That said, you are right that the one step that you certainly have to make is evaluating your own players and the level of confidence that you have in them to be everyday players next year because when opportunities do present themselves, you have to ask yourself, 'is this guy really a better player and will he help us become a better team than the guys that we have right now?'

That, I think, is going to be the question that we are going to have to answer with some of these guys and obviously their performance coming down the stretch is going to be a big factor in that evaluation. I don't think it is ever black and white where we say 'we are definitely going to improve in that position and we absolutely aren't going to have to fill this position.' I think actually in general we have pretty good organizational depth across the board. Given that, we are going to make moves based on the opportunities that present themselves rather than trying to be too narrowly focused on two or three things.

*OC: When Matt Holliday was traded, it was obviously for value, but when Jason Giambi was released and Orlando Cabrera was dealt, it seemed like those were moves to free up playing time for younger players. I was curious, then, why Nomar Garciaparra was kept given that he plays a position, or positions if you include DH, that could be handled by younger players?*

**FZ:** At some level, you do want to have some veteran presence and he has obviously been a very strong presence in our clubhouse. He has worked well with the younger players and I think our younger players have picked up a lot from him. He is really like having another coach on the team. We also believe he can still hit. Pinch-hitting I don't think is something that he has really done a lot of historically, and it hasn't come with the best results. But when he has been in the starting line-up, which we have tried to do against lefties, he's actually done pretty well. As a guy who is still kind of contributing to the team and a guy that isn't taking everyday at-bats from a young player, he is a guy that we saw some value in keeping around.

That said, if the right opportunity came for us to move him to a team that was still in the race to give him a chance to play for a playoff team, we would have done that, but that opportunity never really surfaced.

*OC: Landon Powell has had a strong rookie season backing up Kurt Suzuki. Do you envision a situation next season that would allow Powell and Suzuki to be in the line-up together more often as a way to improve the offense? Would that require carrying a third catcher?*

**FZ:** Landon has really been a pleasant surprise. He is a guy who has been high profile his entire career; he was in high school and he was obviously a high pick coming out of college. There wasn't a ton in his minor league numbers to indicate that he would be this productive in the big leagues. Obviously we are ecstatic to be getting that kind of production from a back-up catcher because you just don't see that that often. It certainly has made us ask whether we should be looking for ways to get his bat into the line-up more often and that is one of the big reasons that we called up Eric Munson even before the Sacramento season was over, to give Bob Geren the flexibility to put Landon in there when he saw the opportunity.

Landon's performance has certainly warranted that situation. I wouldn't explicitly say one way or another that we are definitely not going to use him as a DH or we definitely are [next season]. We have Daric [Barton] as an emergency catcher and down-the-road we have Josh Donaldson, who is a guy who can play a couple of infield positions [first and third] and who has obviously been an everyday catcher. In an ideal case, you have another guy on the roster who can catch if you needed it and that might give you the chance to get Landon into the games more regularly anyway.

*OC: How do you feel about the major league coaching staff at this point? This is now likely to be the third straight losing season. Do you feel like you have had an opportunity to give a fair assessment because you did give them more of a veteran squad to start or is it still a situation where injuries have not given you a chance to assess the coaching staff?*

**FZ:** We are very happy with the coaching staff. We have a good relationship with them. We think they work well with the

players and guys who are new to the coaching staff this season have said that the work ethic and the preparation that they have seen from the players here is as good as they have seen anywhere. Ultimately, those are the things that the coaching staff can control, the work ethic that is on the team and the preparation that goes into each game. At the end of the day, the players' performance dictates whether you win or lose games and there is only so much that the coaching staff can do to ultimately influence what they do on the field once they have taken care of all of the things that they can take care of off the field.

We are very happy with the preparation of our players and how hard they have worked. We feel like they have been very well prepared and I think we really judge the coaching staff based on the things that they can control and in those dimensions, we think that they have done a good job.

## **MINOR LEAGUE NEWS**

### **River Cats prepared to scratch back**

John Schumacher, Sacramento Bee

As he shook off the effects of a plane flight from Memphis, Tenn., and a sleep-deprived morning, River Cats center fielder Matt Carson delivered a message Thursday to the Memphis Redbirds.

The Pacific Coast League Championship Series isn't over.

Memphis enjoys a 2-0 lead in the best-of-five series entering tonight's Game 3 at Raley Field, so the River Cats must win the 7:05 contest to avoid elimination.

Winning a third consecutive PCL title, and their fifth league crown in seven years, would require the Cats to sweep the next three games, with Game 4 scheduled for Saturday night and Game 5 for Sunday, if needed.

Carson said that scenario is within reach.

"I don't think it's as glum as it could be," he said after the Cats dropped 1-0 and 3-2 decisions in the first two games in Memphis.

"They had one timely hit more than we did. It feels like there should be a lot of pressure, but for some reason it doesn't feel that way.

"We play real well at home. I think there's a surprise waiting for them."

A crowd of more than 10,000 is expected to watch the Cats try to turn around the series against a red-hot Memphis team that has won 11 of its past 13 games and is 5-0 in the postseason.

Sacramento went 45-27 at home this season before winning both of its first-round games against Tacoma at Raley Field.

Of course, the River Cats were also 25-13 in one-run games this season before losing two consecutive one-run contests in Memphis.

Sacramento's offense faltered against the Redbirds, generating just two runs and 10 hits in the two games. The River Cats, who hit eight home runs in the four-game Tacoma series, have none in this series and are 1 for 14 with runners in scoring position.

"Their pitching shut us down pretty good," River Cats manager Tony DeFrancesco said. "I just see a little frustration in some of the hitters. They're a little anxious.

"Some of them are young players probably experiencing this for the first time. Guys could be more disciplined, get the nerves out, just have fun.

"We've somehow got to get this offense clicking."

DeFrancesco plans to give the ball tonight to right-hander Jerome Williams, a major league veteran. Williams picked up the victory in Game 3 against Tacoma after allowing one run and seven hits and striking out eight in seven innings.

Memphis plans to counter with left-hander Evan Mac-Lane, who threw seven innings of shutout ball, allowing five hits and striking out six, in the Redbirds' Game 3 first-round playoff triumph over Albuquerque.

The last time the Cats trailed a series 2-0, they won three in a row to beat Salt Lake in the first round of the 2007 playoffs.

"A lot of our guys, they thrive on that energy of the crowd," Carson said. "I don't think there's a guy on our team who doesn't believe we can win."

## **TL Championship: RockHounds' Middleton ready for key Game 3 start**

By Shawn Shroyer, Midland Reporter Telegram

A lot is made about selecting a Game 1 starter in the playoffs. However, the Game 3 starter can have more impact than anyone else in the rotation in a five-game series.

If a team wins the first two games of a series, the third starter is in position to clinch the sweep. If a team drops the first two games of a series, the third starter is depended on to keep the series going. If a series is split after two games, the third starter can tip the balance of a series in his team's favor.

For the second time in this year's Texas League playoffs, RockHounds starter Kyle Middleton is in position to give his club a 2-1 advantage in the series. The 'Hounds head into today's game, which starts at 7:15 p.m. at Arvest Ballpark in Springdale, Ark., tied with the Naturals a game each. But Middleton hasn't been losing any sleep over it.

"I try not to look into it too much," Middleton said. "I just want to know when I'm pitching so I can get ready for it, whether it's the first game, the last game or in the middle. I try not to worry about it."

Since joining the RockHounds in late July, Middleton has been a mainstay in their rotation. Yet, as if a 5-2 record and 2.69 ERA in nine starts during the regular season wasn't impressive enough, he was a stopper in Midland's Division Series with San Antonio.

Pitching Game 3 following San Antonio's victory in Game 2, Middleton went six innings, holding the Missions to one unearned run on six hits and a walk, becoming the RockHounds' first pitcher to earn a win in the playoffs. The 'Hounds took a 2-1 lead in the series with the victory and finished off the Missions the next day.

"I really just wanted to get deep into the game," Middleton said. "I knew if I could get deep into the game it'd be a good game and we'd have a chance to win."

Today will be Middleton's first start against Northwest Arkansas this season, but the 29-year-old veteran isn't likely to be shaken. Middleton has spent a chunk of his career in the Texas League, splitting time in the Royals, Astros and Athletics organizations.

When RockHounds pitching coach Scott Emerson first learned Middleton was joining the team, he remembered him from his days as a closer for the Hooks. But after seeing how much he'd started in his career including for his Independent League team in Pensacola, Fla., the Athletics signed him from, Emerson said he was confident Middleton would be a staple of the rotation.

Middleton exceeded Emerson's expectations.

Emerson looks back to Middleton's entry into the RockHounds' rotation on July 26 and Arnold Leon's shift from the bullpen to the rotation on Aug. 1 as major turning points for the club's pitching staff in the second half of the season. It's been a pleasure for Emerson to see a pitcher who puts in as much work as Middleton and reap the rewards.

"I can't be more happy for a guy like Kyle Middleton," Emerson said. "He's an excellent student of the game and he leads

by example. He's done everything we've asked him to do and more."

Middleton said the secret to his success with the 'Hounds has simply been staying within himself and not trying to do too much, although getting back into affiliated ball was his ultimate goal while pitching in Pensacola.

And that's all RockHounds manager Darren Bush wants Middleton to do today. Bush said he knows Middleton is aware of the gravity of the situation and won't be overwhelmed by it.

"He shows a lot of composure," Bush said. "He's had his ups and downs, but he's shown guys how to limit damage and how to go about your business. He knows that not every day you get to pitch for a championship."