

## **A's News Clips, Thursday, September 24, 2009**

### **Rookie, defense let A's down**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Clayton Mortensen didn't exactly take a step forward Wednesday night in trying to work his way into the A's 2010 pitching plans.

And the right-hander wasn't helped much by his defense.

Despite the blemishes, the A's had a great shot to win a game they dropped 9-8 to the Texas Rangers at the Oakland Coliseum.

Their bats never let them fall too far behind, and they trailed by just a run entering the final two innings. But Rangers closer Frank Francisco slammed the door in the ninth, and the A's lost for just the third time in their past 13 games.

Mortensen (2-3), inserted into the rotation when fellow rookie Vin Mazzaro was lost to injury, left after 42/3 innings, though four of the seven

runs he allowed were unearned.

He was none too pleased with himself for leaving too many pitches over the middle of the plate. That included an 0-2 slider that Hank Blalock ripped for a two-run home run in the top of the fourth that put Texas ahead 4-0.

"I didn't have real good control, I fell behind guys, and I left pitches up the zone that I ended up paying for," Mortensen said.

Down four runs, the A's responded with a five-run fourth inning.

Oakland did what it's done so well lately — string together hits in bunches. Five consecutive hits off Texas starter Tommy Hunter got the A's rolling, and Cliff Pennington's two-run single through the right side gave them a 5-4 lead.

Mortensen, though, couldn't hold that lead. Texas scored four times in the top of the fifth to claim an 8-5 lead, though none of the runs were earned. Mortensen allowed three hits and was charged with three runs that inning, but he wasn't helped by shortstop Pennington's fielding error.

Brad Kilby relieved Mortensen with two outs and allowed Blalock's RBI double. That was the first inherited runner Kilby has allowed to score through his first eight major league outings. Nelson Cruz followed with an RBI single for the first run charged to Kilby. But he still hasn't allowed an earned run.

Oakland scored single runs in the fifth, sixth and seventh and pulled to within 9-8.

They could have done more damage in the seventh. With runners on the corners and one out, Kurt Suzuki struck out swinging and Nomar Garciaparra — pinch-hitting for Jack Cust — took a called third strike.

"We scored eight runs, we were coming back all game," first baseman Daric Barton said. —... Our defense has been good all year, our pitching has been good all year. They scored one more run than we did."

After playing seven straight error-free games, the A's have committed errors in five straight. The three errors Wednesday gave them 93 on the season with 10 games left. They're trying to register a sixth straight season of fewer than 100 errors, which would set a major league record.

### **P.A. announcer Steele eyes an Oct. 3 cameo**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

P.A. announcer Steele eyes an Oct. 3 cameo

A familiar element has been missing at the Oakland Coliseum all season.

Health issues have kept public address announcer Roy Steele from calling a single A's home game. It's unknown if Steele, a fixture behind the microphone since the team arrived in Oakland in 1968, will be able to return.

The A's have a first-class replacement in Dick Callahan, the longtime P.A. voice of the Warriors who currently calls Cal football games. But lots of fans have wondered if Steele's distinctive baritone will ever fill the Coliseum again.

"He says he hopes to be back," said Chester Farrow, the A's scoreboard operator and a good friend of Steele's. "It has to do with regaining some weight and strength."

Steele, 77, suffers from achalasia, a disorder of the esophagus that limits his diet and has caused his weight to drop significantly. He missed a large chunk of games over the last three seasons due to the condition.

But fans could be in for a treat Oct. 3. Steele has agreed to call the last few innings of that day's game against the Los Angeles Angels, as Callahan will have to leave early to work Cal's football game against USC.

The plan is tentative, as Steele has his good and bad days.

"It would be a big treat for the fans," said Troy Smith, the A's senior director of stadium entertainment. "The biggest issue with Roy's condition is he doesn't know how he's going to be week-to-week."

Callahan says he's "keeping the seat warm" for Steele, labeled by broadcaster Jon Miller as "the Voice of God"

"I respect the iconic atmosphere (associated) with Roy Steele," Callahan said. "I don't look at it as replacing him. He doesn't get replaced."

Reliever Jay Marshall has been shut down for the season with left shoulder tendinitis.

Manager Bob Geren expects rookies Brett Anderson and Trevor Cahill to benefit from their first offseason as big leaguers. "They'll come back next year and be able to go 200 innings," Geren said. "Knowing they've got a spot in the rotation might give them a little different perspective." Cahill sits at 174 innings, while Anderson has tossed 1642/3.

Kurt Suzuki was presented with the Catfish Hunter Award, given to the Athletic who best exemplifies the spirit of the Hall of Fame pitcher.

## **San Jose lays off nearly a fourth of its redevelopment staff**

By John Woolfolk, San Jose Mercury News

Hard times hit San Jose's redevelopment agency Wednesday as a state funding raid forced officials to lay off nearly a quarter of the staff.

Now the agency must reconsider a host of projects ranging from neighborhood improvements to an expansion of the downtown convention center.

Redevelopment Director Harry Mavrogenes said the agency was forced lay off 24 of its 109 employees because state officials are taking a total of \$88 million from the agency, one of the largest in California.

"This was a difficult and heart-wrenching decision," Mavrogenes said. "But the state has left us with few options."

To help close a \$24.1 billion budget deficit, state officials approved legislation taking \$2 billion from redevelopment agencies throughout the state. San Jose's share of that grab comes to \$75 million — \$62 million this year and \$13 million in 2010. In addition, the city is still fighting to keep \$13 million that the state approved grabbing last year.

The California Redevelopment Association challenged the state in court over last year's grab and is preparing another lawsuit on the latest raid. But Mavrogenes said the matter may take years to resolve.

Until then, the agency must be prepared to pay the state, he said, adding that failure to do so would trigger a "death penalty provision" that would allow the state to effectively shut down the agency.

San Jose already has laid off 14 city workers in closing an \$84 million operating deficit for the fiscal year running through June 2010. The city will suffer an additional \$20 million cut from the state borrowing property taxes. But city officials believe they can offset that loss by borrowing, thereby avoiding further reductions in staff or services.

While the city expects the state to repay the borrowed property tax money within three years, there is no such obligation concerning the redevelopment funds, most of which the agency will have to pay in May.

"This is strictly a take, an out-and-out take," Mavrogenes said. "We believe it's an illegal take."

But the ax fell more swiftly at the redevelopment agency than elsewhere at City Hall, where the work force is unionized.

Redevelopment agencies are formed to eliminate urban blight and promote revitalization in designated "project areas. Their funding is derived from the growth in taxable property values in those project areas, known as "tax increment."

Since 1977, San Jose's agency has spent \$2.5 billion throughout the city, including more than \$1.8 billion downtown and \$355 million in neighborhood improvements. But the agency, with a capital budget of more than \$200 million, is already coping with reduced income because of near-stagnant growth in the county's property values.

The state raid will not derail some of the agency's highest-profile efforts, Mavrogenes said. Land acquisitions for a proposed ballpark near the Diridon train station to lure Major League Baseball's A's is to come from land sale proceeds, a separate money pot that Mavrogenes said will not be affected by the state's move.

And the agency is contractually obligated to follow through on other pending projects, including the downtown "urban market" at San Pedro Square.

But projects still in development are likely to be delayed indefinitely, most notably the \$350 million expansion of the aging McEnery Convention Center.

Mayor Chuck Reed blamed state officials for failing to make hard budgeting decisions regarding their own finances.

"Today's actions are the result of Sacramento's failure to solve its structural budget problems," Reed said. "Redevelopment provides critical tools to rebuild our economy, create jobs, and revitalize neighborhoods — exactly the kinds of investments we should be making in this recession."

## **A's can't rally from atypical play in field**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

This one had the-end-of-the-season-can't-come-too-soon written all over it.

Three-fourths of the Oakland infield made errors on Wednesday, leading to three unearned runs in a 9-8 loss to the Rangers at the Coliseum, and the A's couldn't quite scramble back despite their best efforts.

Most painful for Oakland, after scoring five times in the fourth to take the lead, the team turned around and gave up four in the fifth, all with two outs.

"That shouldn't happen," A's starter Clayton Mortensen said. "Especially after getting the lead, I've got to complete that inning."

Three runs were charged to Mortensen in the inning and one to reliever Brad Kilby. It was unearned, but still the first run Kilby has allowed in eight major-league appearances. Jeff Gray surrendered an earned run the following inning on a two-out walk and consecutive singles.

The A's have made errors in a season-high five consecutive games and their 2009 total stands at 93 with 10 games remaining. Oakland has made fewer than 100 errors in each of the past five seasons, matching the longest streak in major-league history (Phillies, 2001-2005).

Oakland manager Bob Geren took issue with two errors, saying that Andrus should have been awarded a hit on a ball he hit to short in the Rangers' four-run fifth and that the other, second baseman Mark Ellis' relay to the plate that same inning, "was a perfect one-hop throw."

The A's put up five in the fourth against Tommy Hunter, with two runs coming on a single by Cliff Pennington. Then Oakland scored single runs in the fifth (on Eric Patterson's first homer of the season), the sixth and the seventh to cut Texas' lead to one. With one out in the seventh and men at the corners, however, C.J. Wilson struck out Kurt Suzuki and Nomar Garciaparra.

Mortensen, who was coming off two strong performances, allowed seven runs, but only three of those were earned because of errors by third baseman Adam Kennedy in the first and shortstop Pennington and Ellis in the fifth. Geren said he thought Mortensen was out of that inning with no damage when it appeared Marlon Byrd swung at a pitch in the dirt to end the inning. No swing was called and Byrd's subsequent bloop single scored two runs.

In the fourth, Hank Blalock hit a two-strike pitch for a two-run homer and a 4-0 lead.

"I was planning on burying a slider down and in, and it slipped," Mortensen said. "It was a cookie down the middle, and guys like that don't miss those."

Thus ended Oakland's season-high streak of seven games without allowing a homer, the team's longest such roll since eight games from Aug. 23-31, 2001. Oakland has allowed a league-low 146 home runs.

Kennedy made a terrific play in the sixth, sliding to his left for a sharp grounder by Omar Vizquel, spinning and throwing to first.

**Briefly:** Longtime Coliseum public address announcer Roy Steele, unavailable this season for health reasons, will fill in for the second half of the A's Oct. 3 game against the Angels. ... Suzuki was named the recipient of the Jim "Catfish" Hunter award by the A's coaches and players for his conduct on the field and in the clubhouse.

## **A's LEADING OFF**

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

**How obliging:** What did Adam Kennedy say to get ejected by home-plate umpire Eric Cooper in the first inning Tuesday after a called strike three? "I told him, 'If you're going to keep calling them like that all night, just kick me out right now,'" Kennedy said.

## **A's drop shootout with Rangers**

### **Oakland's subtle mistakes highlighted by Texas' bats**

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- After trading blowouts in the first two games of their four-game series, the Rangers and A's played an eventful back-and-forth affair on Wednesday, with Texas getting a big night from Hank Blalock on the way to a 9-8 victory.

A quick look at the box score suggests that defense made the difference.

Oakland made three errors, all on the infield, and Texas made zero. The Rangers scored five unearned runs, the A's none.

"I wouldn't say they were sloppy," offered Rangers manager Ron Washington, "but they made some mistakes."

A highly respected former infield coach who spent 10 years in Oakland, Washington knows a little something about mistake-free defense. A's third baseman Eric Chavez has such esteem for the man who turned him into a hot-corner vacuum, he gave him one his six Gold Glove Awards as a thank you.

A's second baseman Mark Ellis, who doesn't have a Gold Glove but probably should have two or three, prays at the Altar of Wash as well.

Wednesday's box score, however, doesn't quite tell the whole story. Ellis, for instance, was charged with one of the errors, on his relay throw home in the fifth inning after the second of Blalock's two doubles.

The throw was on the money, but it arrived at the plate on a hop at about the same time as Marlon Byrd. It got past catcher Kurt Suzuki, and after Blalock cruised into third base -- he was heading there as Ellis threw, anyway -- the scoreboard flashed "E4."

"For making a perfect one-hop throw?" spat a thoroughly disagreeable Bob Geren, Oakland's manager. "OK."

Geren wasn't too pleased with the official scorer's opinion of a hard smash off the bat of Rangers rookie Elvis Andrus earlier in the inning, either. It was to the right of A's shortstop Cliff Pennington, who eschewed the backhand play for which the play begged and found himself handcuffed by his two-handed attempt. "E6."

"That was a hit," Geren said with a measure of disgust.

Nonetheless, both plays prolonged an already long inning -- an inning that ushered A's rookie right-hander Clay Mortensen into the early evening with the loss. He was charged with seven runs on six hits and a walk, but only three of the runs were earned.

"Part of pitching up here [in the big leagues] is pitching out of jams," he said. "I didn't do that very well."

Blalock certainly didn't make it any easier, starting with the RBI double he drilled for a 2-0 Texas lead after third baseman Adam Kennedy's two-out bobble in the first inning went for error No. 1.

"The double in the first inning was actually a good pitch," Mortensen said. "It was a changeup down, but he's a good hitter. He stayed on it and drove it into the gap."

Three innings later, Blalock got a not-so-good pitch that Mortensen would love to have back. It landed on the not-so-fun side of the center-field wall for a two-run homer.

"It was an 0-2 pitch right down the middle, belt-high," Mortensen said. "You can't make a mistake like that up here, especially to a guy like that.

Added Geren: "Good hitters hit mistakes well, and that's what he did."

The A's answered back with a five-run surge against right-hander Tommy Hunter in the bottom of the fourth, Rajai Davis getting the rally started with a single -- the first of his nightly minimum of two hits.

Oakland got RBI doubles from Ryan Sweeney and Ellis and run-scoring singles from Jack Cust and Pennington in the frame, but the "errors" by Pennington and second baseman Ellis in the fifth helped Texas reclaim the lead.

"I really didn't think we played that bad on defense," Ellis said. "It was just a weird game."

Eric Patterson's first homer of the year, a solo shot in the bottom of the fifth, cut the lead to 8-6, and both teams scored again in the sixth, with David Murphy stroking an RBI single off Jeff Gray in the top half before Daric Barton followed suit to chase Hunter in the bottom of the frame.

Davis' RBI double in the bottom of the seventh inning cut the lead to one, and an infield single by Sweeney put runners at the corners with one out, but Rangers lefty C.J. Wilson struck out Suzuki and pinch-hitter Nomar Garciaparra.

Fittingly, Oakland's final threat died in the glove of Blalock. With the tying run at second in the eighth, Blalock made a diving stop of a smash pulled down the first-base line by Kennedy and scrambled to the bag to end the inning.

"They scored nine runs, and we still had a chance to win the game late, so it was a pretty good performance by the offense," Geren said.

Just not quite good enough, said Barton, who summed things up with stone-faced simplicity.

"It was just one of those games," he said, "where they scored more than we did."

## **Anderson looking to win out**

### **Oakland (72-80) vs. Texas (83-68), 2:35 p.m. CT**

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A's left-hander Brett Anderson had a goal heading into his highly anticipated rookie season: double-digit wins.

"Winning 10 games in the big leagues is tough," Anderson said after reaching that milestone and improving to .500 on the year with six innings of four-hit work against the Indians on Friday.

Now Anderson, 21, is setting his sights a touch higher.

To get there, he'll have to win his final two starts, the first of which is scheduled for Thursday in the finale of a four-game series against the Rangers at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum.

"That'd be great, especially with the struggles I had earlier the year," he said Wednesday. "The goal is 12-10. That would be a pretty good rookie campaign."

Having claimed a spot in the starting rotation in his first trip to big league Spring Training, Anderson had an ERA of 5.01 in April, 6.38 in May and 5.00 in June. He turned a corner by going 2-1 with a 1.87 ERA in five July starts, and he's 3-0 with a 2.50 ERA in three starts in September.

What's changed?

"I'm just trusting my stuff," he explained. "You can't second-guess yourself. I was second-guessing myself earlier in the season, and I'm not doing that as much anymore because I'm trusting my stuff more."

"I've made a few physical adjustments, but trusting myself and having a great catcher back there [in Kurt Suzuki] has been the biggest thing."

Anderson, who is 7-3 with a 3.10 ERA over his past 10 starts, credits the advanced workout environment of the Majors for keeping him strong throughout the grind of his longest professional season. He's thrown 164 2/3 innings, up from 105 in two Minor League stops last year.

"Everything about it is better up here," he said. "You have a program and you can stick with it because every stadium has a weight room, and you have more people helping you out. It's just a lot more consistent. In the Minors, it's really hard to be consistent with everything you do."

### Pitching matchup

#### **OAK: LHP Brett Anderson (10-10, 4.21 ERA)**

Anderson put together one of his sharpest outings of the year his last time out, striking out a career-high 10 over six shutout innings. He was taken out after 89 pitches because the A's are monitoring his workload, and he likely won't be allowed to throw more than 90 pitches in either of his final two assignments. His command has been tremendous of late, as he's averaging one walk over his past six assignments. With three strikeouts against the Rangers, whom he held to two runs on six hits over 7 2/3 innings on Aug. 3, Anderson will set the Oakland rookie record for strikeouts in a season at 142.




#### **TEX: RHP Scott Feldman (17-5, 3.62 ERA)**

Feldman won his 17th game in a 3-2 victory over the Angels on Saturday and has three more starts, giving him a chance to become the fourth 20-game winner in Rangers history. His 17 wins are the second most by a Rangers pitcher this decade behind 18 won by Kenny Rogers in 2004. Feldman, 26, is the third-youngest pitcher in club history to win 17 games. He is 12-1 with a 2.58 ERA in 15 games (14 starts) on the road this season. He is 2-1 with a 4.91 ERA in three starts against the Athletics.

### **Dribblers ...**

A's manager Bob Geren expressed surprise at media reports suggesting that outfielder Scott Hairston (left hip, back) might be done for the season, reiterating that Hairston is day-to-day. "We kind of laughed about it when we saw it on TV," he said. Hairston, however, on Tuesday said he's been playing in pain since July and is hesitant to take the field again until he's pain-free. He's also been dealing with a strained left hamstring. ... Rookie outfielder Matt Carson, a right-handed hitter who slammed his first big league homer on Monday, likely won't get another start until Sunday, when the A's face Angels lefty Joe Saunders in the finale of a three-game series in Anaheim. ... Eric Patterson, who has started the past two games in left field, is expected to get a start at second base on Thursday to give Mark Ellis a day off. ... The A's have a day off on Monday, but they plan on sticking with a six-man rotation through the end of the season. ... Add lefty reliever Jay Marshall to the list of A's pitchers whose seasons have ended early, joining Joey Devine (elbow), Justin Duchscherer (elbow, back, clinical depression), Josh Outman (elbow), Dallas Braden (left foot), Dan Giese (elbow), Vin Mazzaro (shoulder) and Brett Tomko (shoulder). Marshall has shoulder tendinitis and is heading home for the winter on Thursday. Geren said Mazzaro (shoulder tendinitis) is leaving the team on Thursday, too.

### Up next

- Friday: Athletics (Gio Gonzalez, 5-6, 6.15) at Angels (Jered Weaver, 15-7, 3.87), 7:05 p.m. PT 
- Saturday: Athletics (Dana Eveland, 2-3, 6.50) at Angels (John Lackey, 11-8, 3.56), 6:05 p.m. PT 
- Sunday: Athletics (Edgar Gonzalez, 0-3, 5.22) at Angels (Joe Saunders, 14-7, 4.63), 12:35 p.m. PT 

## Suzuki receives Catfish Hunter Award

### A's catcher honored for conduct on field, in clubhouse

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- During his time as an ace right-hander for the A's, Jim "Catfish" Hunter was known as someone who carried more than his share of the load.

Current A's catcher Kurt Suzuki can certainly identify with that, and so Wednesday's announcement that Suzuki was selected by his teammates and coaches as the recipient of the 2009 Jim "Catfish" Hunter Award seemed fitting.

Suzuki, who likely will lead American League catchers in games started for the second consecutive season, and Hunter, who twice threw more than 300 innings and eclipsed the 250-frame mark in six other seasons, would have made quite the battery.

The kind that never runs out of juice.

Before being formally presented with the annual award, which, according to a team release, honors an A's player "whose play on the field and conduct in the clubhouse best exemplifies the courageous, competitive and inspirational spirit demonstrated by the late Hall of Fame pitcher," Suzuki admitted that he doesn't have an encyclopedic knowledge of Hunter's legacy.

Former A's catcher Ray Fosse, a teammate of Hunter's and a longtime broadcaster with the club, helped fill Suzuki in.

"Foss told me some things," Suzuki said during batting practice before the third game of a four-game series against the visiting Rangers at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum. "Three-hundred innings, man. That's a workhorse."

There was quality with the quantity, too.

Hunter posted a 224-166 record and a 3.26 ERA in his 15-year career with the Kansas City/Oakland A's and New York Yankees, he holds Oakland's all-time career mark for wins (131), and he won 20 or more games in five consecutive seasons (1971-75).

After helping the A's to their third consecutive World Series title in 1974, Hunter, who won a career-high 25 regular-season games that year, won the AL Cy Young Award. He earned five World Series rings during his career and was 4-0 with one save in seven World Series appearances with the A's, was an eight-time All-Star, did not miss a start from his '65 debut until the '77 season and was inducted to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in '87.

"The guy was a stud," Suzuki said. "It's pretty cool to win an award with his name on it."

Suzuki is on pace to become the second catcher in club history to lead the team in RBIs, and he was recently installed as Oakland's cleanup hitter, but he's also considered one of the game's top defensive catchers. This season, he has played a vital role in developing one of the youngest pitching staffs in the Majors, including a starting rotation that averaged 23 years of age for most of the season, including two 21-year-olds in Brett Anderson and Trevor Cahill, and a closer, Andrew Bailey, who is considered a leading candidate for AL Rookie of the Year honors.

Under Suzuki's leadership, the staff entered Wednesday's game ranked third in the AL in ERA (4.25) and has allowed the fewest home runs (145) in the league.

"Any honor Kurt gets, he deserves it," said A's manager Bob Geren. "He's just a tremendous player all the way around."

Hunter was diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease) in September 1998 and died of complications from the disease on Sept. 9, 1999, at the age of 53.

Previous winners of the Jim "Catfish" Hunter Award include Tim Hudson (2004), Mark Ellis (2005, 2007), Jason Kendall (2006) and Mike Sweeney (2008).

## **Pennington has unlikely mentor in Crosby**

### **A's rookie shortstop learning from veteran he supplanted**

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Nomar Garciaparra of the A's is one of the best shortstops of his generation, but he's 36 years old and no longer an everyday player.

Cliff Pennington is a 24-year-old rookie and has been Oakland's starting shortstop since Orlando Cabrera was traded on July 31.

Given that Garciaparra is widely respected in the clubhouse for his willingness to help younger players, you might assume he's taken on the role of Pennington's primary mentor.

Yet, that unofficial title, ironically enough, belongs to Bobby Crosby.

"I mostly talk to Nomar about hitting," Pennington said Wednesday before the third game of a four-game series against the Rangers at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum. "Bobby is the one I go to when it comes to what to do out in the field, positioning, footwork, things like that. We talk all the time."

The irony, of course, lies in Crosby's history with the club. He had been Oakland's starting shortstop since the start of the 2004 season, after which he was named the American League Rookie of the Year, but he lost his job when the A's signed Cabrera this spring, and he was publicly peeved when Pennington was handed the job after the Cabrera trade.

At the same time, Crosby went out of his way to say that his feelings had nothing to do with Pennington, who was the team's first-round pick in the 2005 First-Year Player Draft.

And according to Pennington, Crosby -- a.k.a. "Bones" -- has continued to go out of his way to offer advice, guidance and support.

"Bones has helped me more than anyone," Pennington said. "From my first Spring Training with the team, through this Spring Training, to when I got called up [last season] and all the way up to today -- he's always been there for me."



Relayed those comments, Crosby shrugged off the suggestion that working with his replacement is unusual or potentially awkward in any way.

"The guy's a teammate," Crosby said. "That's what teammates are supposed to do, help each other out. It doesn't matter what the situation is. It's just what you do."

Pennington played more games at second base than at shortstop during a 36-game stint with the big league club last season, but what he's done since taking over at shortstop suggests that he could be the team's long-term solution at the position.

"He's gotten a lot better since the first time he came up," Crosby said. "He's a lot smoother."

A former Texas A&M star, Pennington batted .320 over his first 14 games, and since coming out of a 20-game funk in which he batted .167, he was batting .386 (22-for-57 with eight multiple-hit games, 12 runs, five doubles, two triples, two home runs and a .470 on-base percentage over his past 16 games entering Wednesday.

Batting .284 overall, Pennington also has provided strong defense up the middle, with two errors in 213 total chances in 49 games for a fielding percentage of .991.

When asked to list Pennington's strengths, Garciaparra, Crosby and A's manager Bob Geren put his throwing arm at or near the top of the list.

"He's made a lot of plays this year because of his arm strength," Geren said.

Asked to list the areas in which Pennington needs to improve, Garciaparra mentioned footwork around the bag. Pennington didn't disagree.

Nor did he dispute Crosby's claim: "He has good actions, but he's just a little too quick sometimes."

"I have times when I get a little spastic," Pennington said with a laugh. "I'll rush things and speed things up, and that's where you get inconsistency. It sounds strange, because I've always played fast, but up here you have to try to play as slow as possible."

Garciaparra said Pennington also has to grow into the role as the infield's "backbone."

"As the shortstop, you have to kind of control everything out there," Garciaparra said. "He doesn't have that yet, but that comes with time and experience. He definitely has the ability and the tools. He doesn't look out of place at all."

If he does, he might hear about it from his unlikely but more-than-willing mentor.

"If I see something that can help him, I'll definitely mention it," Crosby said. "Any help I can give him, I'll give it."

## **A's take beating from Rangers**

Associated Press

OAKLAND -- Hank Blalock homered and drove in four runs, leading the Texas Rangers to a 9-8 victory over the A's on Wednesday night.

David Murphy and Marlon Byrd each had two RBIs as the Rangers won for the third time in 10 games. Nelson Cruz also drove in a run for Texas, which trails Boston by seven games for the wild card and the Angels by 6 1/2 in the American League West.

Eric Patterson hit a home run and Cliff Pennington drove in two runs for the A's, who lost for the third time in 11 games.

Tommy Hunter (9-4) won for the third time in four decisions after giving up seven runs on nine hits over 5 2-3 innings. He struck out two and did not walk a batter.

Four Rangers relievers -- Dustin Nippert, Darren O'Day, C.J. Wilson and Frank Francisco -- held off the A's. Francisco pitched the ninth for his 24th save in 27 chances.

A's starter Clayton Mortensen (2-3) had his two-game winning streak stopped after giving up seven runs -- three earned -- on six hits over 4 2-3 innings. He walked one and struck out six.

Murphy and Blalock drove in runs in the first to put the Rangers on top. Blalock's two-run shot in the fourth made it 4-0.

With one out in the bottom of the fourth, five consecutive A's hit safely and all five scored. Pennington's two-run single was the big blow and gave the A's a 5-4 edge. Ryan Sweeney and Mark Ellis doubled in a run and Jack Cust singled home a run.

The Rangers regained the lead in the fifth as Byrd singled in two runs, Blalock added an RBI double and Nelson Cruz singled home a run for an 8-5 lead.

After Patterson homered for the A's in the fifth, Murphy's two-out single in the sixth gave the Rangers a 9-6 advantage.

Daric Barton singled a home in the sixth and Davis doubled home another in the seventh to make it 9-8.