

A's News Clips, Saturday, September 26, 2009

Ellis adapts to new role

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

A's second baseman Mark Ellis began the season flanked by an accomplished group of infielders in Eric Chavez, Orlando Cabrera and Jason Giambi.

But as the season's final week is about to unfold, his most crucial role is that of mentor to wet-behind-the-ears shortstop Cliff Pennington.

Things obviously didn't go as scripted this season for the A's, who beat the Los Angeles Angels 3-0 on Friday.

Cabrera was traded, Giambi was released, and the A's adjusted their goals after falling from contention in the American League West.

Likewise, different things have been expected of Ellis -- like dishing wisdom to Pennington, who was installed at short after Cabrera was dealt. The two stood side-by-side chatting at second base Friday as the A's took batting practice.

When Ellis talks about Pennington, he sounds like a teacher who's proud of his pupil but expects even more.

"You try to tell him, 'You're the shortstop, That's your infield,'" Ellis said before the game. "You have to be the man. You have to have that swagger. That's something he's working on. He's doing a lot better."

The role suits Ellis well, and it's one he better grow accustomed to. It's conceivable the A's could go very young with their infield next season.

Highly rated prospect Brett Wallace may be installed at third base if Adam Kennedy isn't re-signed. Chris Carter, another blue-chipper, could slug his way into the job at first base. Pennington has shown signs of being the real deal at short.

That would leave Ellis, 32, as Jedi Master of a raw bunch. Now in his eighth season with Oakland, Ellis has learned patience is a must.

The A's are on pace for their third straight losing season. Ellis was part of division-winning teams in 2002 and 2003 (his first two big league seasons) and 2006.

"It's been really tough," Ellis said. "You come into the league and start off in the playoffs, field a real competitive team every year, then all of a sudden you have three losing seasons. You expect to be in the playoffs every year. You (also) lose a lot of good teammates (who get traded). (But) that's kind of the way it is. You go out and play as hard as you can."

Ellis entered Friday hitting .297 since the All-Star break. Overall, he's hitting .270 with nine homers and 57 RBI.

He's in the first season of a two-year \$11 million deal, with a \$6 million club option for 2011. And he thinks the A's have set a good foundation with their solid young pitching.

A's manager Bob Geren said he asked Ellis to take Pennington under his wing when Pennington was called up July 31. Pennington has gleaned plenty from Ellis' work ethic.

"It's just nice to have a guy like that, who's so good that it makes my job easier," Pennington said. "His mental focus is untouchable."

Gio Gonzalez (6-6) struck out seven and walked one Friday, combining with Michael Wuertz and Andrew Bailey on Oakland's shutout of the Angels. The A's have won 15 of their past 19 games.

Notes: Chavez, out for the season following back surgery, was at Angel Stadium Friday. He said he hopes to start baseball activity in December. "... Right-hander Brett Tomko, also out for the season, said doctors told him he "pulled a

nerve" in his right biceps, which is causing numbness. Tomko said extended rest should have him ready for spring training. He'll be a free agent.

Gonzalez cool as ice, relievers even better

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

In his brief big-league career, Gio Gonzalez has become known as much for his nervous energy as for his talent.

He's got a great deal of the latter, but at times his emotions still work against him. Not on Friday night in the A's 3-0 victory at Anaheim - Gonzalez appeared unflappable in his 6 1/3 scoreless innings of work against the pending division champs, especially in the diciest situations.

"That was beyond a quality start," Oakland closer Andrew Bailey said. "Gio threw up some goose eggs."

Every time the Angels got a man in scoring position, Gonzalez bore down. In the third, with men at first and second, he got Erick Aybar to hit into an inning-ending double play. In the fifth, after Howie Kendrick's two-out double, Gonzalez struck out Jeff Mathis.

The next inning, Aybar tripled with one out and Gonzalez struck out Bobby Abreu (98 RBIs) and got Vladimir Guerrero to pop out foul near the on-deck circle.

Gonzalez credited an improved two-seam fastball after changing the grip. His changeup was better, too, and manager Bob Geren said Gonzalez's curveball was the best it's been all year.

"It was landing for strikes," Gonzalez said of the curve. "You can be a happy pitcher when your stuff is like that."

Friday, Gonzalez (6-6) gave up four hits and walked one while striking out seven. He left with one on and one out in the seventh, and Michael Wuertz took over and struck out Kendry Morales and Howie Kendrick. Wuertz also struck out the side the next inning, and the five K's overall tied his career high.

"The job Michael did might have topped Gio's performance, if you can believe it," Geren said. "He's been awesome all year. I just can't describe how good he's been."

Overall, Wuertz has 100 strikeouts, a career high and the most by an AL reliever. He has not allowed a run in nine outings.

"To go out and try to match (Wuertz) is kind of a challenge we have," Bailey said. "Like a game within a game."

Bailey earned his 26th save, an ongoing Oakland rookie record, and he has converted 21 in a row, the longest active streak in the league.

Oakland's offense was a hot topic coming into the series - the team had scored 51 runs in the six previous games, and the team average for September was .301, the highest in the majors. Friday, the A's didn't get their first hit until there were two outs in the fourth. The team then recorded single runs in the fifth, sixth and seventh; longtime Angels second

baseman Adam Kennedy drove in Oakland's first run. Geren called Eric Patterson a "human pinball" for getting hit by two throws from Angels catcher Mathis; the second error allowed Patterson to score from third in the seventh.

Briefly: Third baseman Eric Chavez and former A's catcher Adam Melhuse were in the clubhouse and dugout before the game. Chavez's rehab from his second back surgery in less than two years is going well, he said. ... Triple-A Sacramento first baseman Chris Carter will play winter ball for Obregon in Mexico, according to assistant general manager David Forst. ... Prospect Michael Ynoa, sidelined by an elbow strain all summer, is at instructional league in Phoenix and throwing at a distance of 65 feet with no trouble, Forst said. Ynoa turned 18 on Thursday.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Tomko's trouble: After testing to rule out blood clots or a bulging disk, starter Brett Tomko was diagnosed with a nerve traction injury in his right biceps, essentially a pulled nerve. Rest is the answer - which might be tough for Tomko with newborn twins at home.

Gio throttles Angels as A's win again

Rookie hurls 6 1/3 shutout innings; team makes it 10 of 12

By Rhett Bollinger / MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- After posting to back-to-back starts in which he didn't even get out of the fourth inning, A's left-hander Gio Gonzalez turned to pitching coach Curt Young and bullpen coach Ron Romanick for help.

Gonzalez worked with the two and decided to change the grip on both his two-seam fastball and his changeup, and the results couldn't have been much better on Friday against the Angels.

Gonzalez dominated the high-powered Angels offense by tossing 6 1/3 innings as the offense did just enough in Oakland's 3-0 win in front of 43,242 at Angel Stadium, giving the surging A's their 10th win in 12 games.

"That was one of the better performances he's had," A's manager Bob Geren said after his team closed to within six games of .500 with nine to play. "He didn't walk a batter until the last guy, so that's what I was happy with. He didn't fall behind batters."

Gonzalez allowed just four hits and also struck out seven batters as the Angels went 0-for-4 with runners in scoring position against him.

And he did it with the curveball, too, as Geren called Gonzalez's breaking ball "by far the best" it's been this season.

"It felt good with the curveball landing for strikes," Gonzalez said. "You can be a happy pitcher when stuff like that happens. I had all three pitches working tonight, so I'm thankful for that."

Gonzalez also got just enough offense behind him after the A's were held in check early by Angels right-hander Jered Weaver until finally breaking through with a run in the fifth inning on an RBI single by Adam Kennedy.

The A's then added to their lead with runs in the sixth and seventh innings. Daric Barton had a run-scoring single in the sixth to score Ryan Sweeney, who led off the frame with a double off Weaver, who allowed two runs on six hits over six innings.

"My fastball command was pretty erratic," Weaver said. "Some things fell. That's baseball."

In the seventh, Eric Patterson did it all himself with a little help from Angels catcher Jeff Mathis, whose errant throw to second base on a stolen base allowed Patterson to reach third before Mathis uncorked another errant throw on a pickoff play at third that allowed Patterson to score Oakland's third run.

Geren called Patterson a "human pinball" as the ball hit him on both of Mathis' throws.

"We kind of scratched the offense together," Geren said. "It was nothing spectacular but we battled and got some guys on base."

But if the offense wasn't spectacular, the bullpen duo of reliever Michael Wuertz and closer Andrew Bailey certainly was.

Wuertz relieved Gonzalez in the seventh inning with one out and matched a career high with five strikeouts in 1 2/3 innings worth of work.

"The relief job Michael did might've topped Gio's performance if you can believe it," Geren said. "He struck out five guys and allowed a little six-hop weak single. He struck out lefties and righties."

Bailey then came in to earn his 26th save of the season while also picking up strikeout No. 13 on the night for the A's after shaking off a throwing error by shortstop Cliff Pennington to start the frame.

"The consistency they've both brought to the bullpen is hard to match," Geren said. "A lot of teams going into the postseason right now wouldn't want to face something like that."

Even though Wuertz and Bailey won't be in the playoffs this season for the A's, they can at least be encouraged by the fact that the club's 16-7 record this month is the best in baseball.

"We're rolling right now and it's fun to see," Bailey said. "Our guys are doing well so it gives you excitement for next year and years to come."

Six-man rotation a success

Oakland (74-80) at Los Angeles (90-63), 6:05 p.m. PT

By Rhet Bollinger / MLB.com

ANAHEIM -- When the A's decided to use a six-man rotation down the stretch starting on Sept. 1, it was done for the sole purpose of limiting the number of innings for their young pitchers.

After all, the rotation has comprised at least four rookies since June 2, and right now rookies Brett Anderson, Trevor Cahill, Gio Gonzalez and Clay Mortensen are starters.

But since that change to six-man rotation, the A's have been on fire as the club is (16-7) and the ERA for the starting rotation has been a sterling (3.62).

The A's will continue to employ that six-man unit the rest of the season, even with the club's off-day Monday, with this weekend's starters being the same as next weekend's.

"We've been with it for quite a while to get our young players some extra rest," A's manager Bob Geren said. "It's a way of controlling innings to limit them to 175-180 innings. That's our goal."

The A's, though, won't turn to one of their rookies on Saturday against the Angels when left-hander Dana Eveland takes the mound against right-hander John Lackey.

Eveland, who has played parts of five seasons in the Majors, has been solid in September with a 2.00 ERA in four appearances, including one start that came Sunday against Indians when he allowed just one run over five innings to get the win.

But the A's will face a tough task as Lackey has been dominant against Oakland in his career with a 16-4 record and a 2.54 ERA in 28 starts.

"They've been division rivals," Lackey said, "and we always seem to have competitive games with them."

Meanwhile, right-hander Brett Tomko received some good news as his season-ending injury was diagnosed as a pulled nerve in his right biceps, meaning it won't require surgery and there's no structural damage.

Tomko, who was a major part of the rotation's recent success with a 4-1 record and a 2.95 ERA in six starts since joining the club on Aug. 18, said it might have happened because he went from pitching infrequently with the Yankees to becoming a full-time starter in a short period of time.

"They think I pulled the nerve," Tomko said. "It just kind of feels asleep and numb all the way down by arm. But it's just one of those things where there's nothing we can do until that nerve calms down. There's no surgery or anything, it's like a pulling a hamstring."

Tomko, who is a free agent after the season, said the injury will not affect his offseason workout plan and he will be ready to go by Spring Training.

Pitching matchup

OAK: LHP Dana Eveland (2-3, 6.50 ERA)

Eveland, moved into Oakland's six-man rotation to take the place of Tomko, picked up his first win since April when he held the Indians to a run on five hits and two walks over five innings his last time out. A member of Oakland's rotation, Eveland lost his job after being tagged for 10 hits in 4 2/3 innings against the Mariners on May 1 and was optioned shortly thereafter to Triple-A Sacramento, where he spent most of the year. A 25-year-old whose command needs to be spot-on for him to be effective, Eveland has made four appearances this month since being recalled, the first three out of the bullpen. He's faced the Angels once this year, allowing three runs on eight hits and two walks over six innings of a start on April 8 in Anaheim. He did not get a decision in Oakland's 6-4 victory.



LAA: RHP John Lackey (11-8, 3.56 ERA)

After a rough start, yielding three first-inning runs on two walks and three singles, Lackey settled in and got through six innings at Texas on Sunday, claiming the win while giving up five runs (four earned) in six innings. Lackey had given up three earned runs combined in his previous four starts, covering 33 2/3, but he has a history of struggling in his home state. Lackey also has a history of dominating the Athletics. He turned them away on Aug. 30 with one unearned run across eight innings for his 100th career win and is 16-4 in 28 career starts against Oakland with a 2.54 ERA. He's tied with Frank Tanana for fourth in wins in franchise history with 102.

Tidbits

Scott Hairston was held out of the lineup again on Friday with a sore hip and SI joint. Geren said Hairston just isn't improving, so his return his weekend is doubtful. ... The A's are 4-0-4 in their last eight series, which is their longest streak without a loss since July 27-Sept. 3, 2006. ... The A's and Angels have combined to win each of the last eight AL West crowns, with the Angels inching toward making it the last nine.

Up next

- Sunday: Athletics (Edgar Gonzalez, 0-3, 5.22) at Angels (Joe Saunders, 14-7, 4.63), 12:35 p.m. PT 
- Monday: Off-day
- Tuesday: Athletics (Trevor Cahill, 10-12, 4.45) at Mariners (Felix Hernandez, 17-5, 2.49), 7:10 p.m. PT 

A's Gonzalez outpitches Weaver

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ANAHEIM — The A's want to leave town before the Los Angeles Angels wrap up another AL West title. Rookie Gio Gonzalez did his part with his second scoreless outing of the season.

Gonzalez outpitched Jered Weaver and the last-place Athletics beat Los Angeles, 3-0, on Friday night, keeping the Angels' magic number at four for clinching their fifth division title in six years.

"They're a great ballclub, they've proven that all year, and they're close to clinching. But obviously, you don't ever want to watch another team celebrate," reliever Michael Wuertz said.

The Angels, just 16-16 since Aug. 22, are trying to become the first AL West team to win three straight division titles since Oakland accomplished the feat from 1988-90. They have a seven-game lead on the Rangers, who beat Tampa Bay 8-3 in Texas.

Gonzalez (6-6) allowed four hits and a walk over 6 1-3 innings and struck out seven in his 16th start, after going 1-4 with a 7.01 ERA over his previous seven. Oakland leads the majors with 111 starts by rookie pitchers, the most by the club in one season since the franchise left Kansas City following the 1967 campaign.

The 23-year-old left-hander tried a new grip on his two-seam fastball, something he's been working on with pitching coach Curt Young and bullpen coach Ron Romanick, and it made a difference.

"We were talking before the game about feeling that competitive attitude, just going out there and trying to attack," Gonzalez said. "I had all three pitches working tonight, which I was grateful for. Even my changeup had some effect, and I was keeping it down in a good changeup velocity. I was throwing the curveball for strikes, and you can always be a happy pitcher when stuff like that works."

Andrew Bailey pitched a hitless ninth for his 26th save in 30 chances, sending the Angels to their seventh loss in 11 games and sixth shutout loss of this season.

"A lot of guys in our lineup are soft right now. And until we start to get that good two-strike approach, we're going to have to scarp for runs," manager Mike Scioscia said. "We'll tinker with the lineup tomorrow. But when you strike out 28 times in two games, that's a lot of easy outs for the other club. We're better than that, and we'll come out of this."

Wuertz, Bailey's setup man, got all five of his outs on strikeouts to raise his season total to 100 — the second most by any reliever and 12 behind Dodgers closer Jonathan Broxton.

"I knew it was within reach. But did I ever think it was going to happen tonight? No chance — especially against a team like that," Wuertz said. "That's a great hitting lineup with a bunch of scary hitters. But when you get on a stage like this with a lot of people in the stands, you just step it up a little bit and battle them."

Weaver (15-8) pitched six innings, allowing two runs and six hits, including RBI singles by Adam Kennedy and Daric Barton. The right-hander has lost three consecutive starts for the first time in 3 1/2 big league seasons, but he wasn't up to par in this one because of stiffness in his upper back.

"It's just one of those things I go through every year — just a little tightness — and it just wouldn't loosen up for me," Weaver said. "It didn't hurt, or anything like that. It just restricted me and kept me from getting out in front and finishing off some pitches."

Weaver, who came in with a career-high 168 strikeouts, got his only one of this outing on his 60th pitch — when he fanned Jack Cust with runners at first and second to end the fourth inning.

Weaver and Gonzalez matched zeros until the fifth, when Kennedy singled in Barton with two out. Barton led off the inning with a walk, one of three allowed by Weaver.

Barton made it 2-0 in the sixth with a two-out single after Ryan Sweeney led off the inning with a bloop double that glanced off the glove of shortstop Erick Aybar in short center field.

Oakland got its third run with the help of two throwing errors by catcher Jeff Mathis. Eric Patterson singled, stole second and continued to third after Mathis' toss struck the runner and caromed into the outfield. Mathis compounded the miscue by trying to pick off Patterson and throwing it past third baseman Chone Figgins.

Cust, who struck out more times than any AL player in each of the last two seasons, again is atop that list with 176 — 13 more than Tampa Bay's Carlos Pena, who is done for the season because of two broken fingers. The last batter to lead the AL in strikeouts for three straight years was Minnesota's Bobby Darwin (1972-74).

Angels designated hitter Vladimir Guerrero was 0 for 4, dropping his average to .296. The 2004 AL MVP, who missed 35 games with a torn chest muscle and another 21 with a left calf strain, is trying to join Rod Carew and Tony Gwynn as the only players in the last 50 years to hit .300 or better in 13 consecutive seasons.

NOTES: The Angels are 23-25 against the AL West — the only first-place team that has a losing record within their division.

... The sellout crowd of 43,242 pushed the Angels' home attendance total past the 3 million mark for the seventh straight season.

Oakland A's MLN: Alumni Report

Melissa Lockard
OaklandClubhouse.com

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Every year, players come and go out of the Oakland A's organization. We like to check-in with former A's farmhands on a periodic basis to see how they are faring. Inside, we take a look at the 2009 seasons for a number of former A's prospects...

Dan Meyer: The prize of the Tim Hudson trade, Meyer was designated for assignment by the A's during the off-season and claimed off of waivers by the Florida Marlins. He made the Marlins Opening Day roster as a reliever and has been one of their most reliable bullpen arms this season. He has appeared in 66 games, posting a 2.96 ERA and a 1.13 WHIP in 54.2 innings. He has 52 strike-outs against 18 walks and has saved two games and won three.

John Baker: Baker, the A's fourth round choice in 2002, was traded by Oakland to the Florida Marlins before the start of the 2007 season. He made his big league debut with the Marlins in 2008 and impressed, hitting .299/.392/.447 in 61 games. Baker has been the Marlins' regular catcher against right-handed pitchers in 2009, appearing in 106 games. He has a .268/.348/.415 line with nine homers and 49 RBIs in 354 at-bats this season.

Sean Gallagher: Gallagher, acquired last season from the Cubs in the Rich Harden deal, was on the A's Opening Day roster, but he made only six appearances (two starts) for the A's before being sent to Triple-A Sacramento. He made five strong starts for the River Cats (1.74 ERA in 20.2 innings) but was then sidelined with a knee injury. While still out with that knee injury, Gallagher was traded to the San Diego Padres as part of the package that landed Oakland Scott Hairston. Gallagher continued his rehab with the Padres' Triple-A squad in Portland, returning to the mound on September 4th, when he allowed three runs in one inning. He was a September call-up for San Diego and has been pitching out of the Padres' bullpen this month. In seven games, he has pitched five innings, allowing five hits and five walks, but no runs. He has struck-out three and won two games. Gallagher is expected to compete for a starting rotation spot in San Diego next season.

Ryan Webb: Webb was also a part of the package sent by Oakland to San Diego for Hairston. The A's 2004 fourth round pick began the year as a starter with Sacramento, but he was moved into the bullpen in April and pitched much better out of that role, seeing his velocity rise from 92-94 to 94-97. Since the trade, Webb has spent most of his time pitching in San Diego's bullpen (he made three appearances for Triple-A Portland). In his first big league action, Webb has pitched well, posting a 3.91 ERA in 23 innings. He has allowed 24 hits and 11 walks, but has struck-out 18 and won his only decision.

Craig Italiano: Italiano was the third part of the Hairston package. Like Webb and Gallagher, he made the switch from starter to reliever this season. For Italiano, the switch came after the trade was made. Before the deal, Italiano was 5-6 with a 5.63 ERA as a starter for High-A Stockton. He stayed in the California League after the trade, pitching for the Lake Elsinore Storm out of their bullpen. In 31.1 innings, the hard-throwing right-hander posted a sparkling 1.44 ERA. He allowed 24 hits and 10 walks and he struck-out 44.

Brooks Conrad: Conrad made his major league debut with Oakland last season and led the Sacramento River Cats in a number of offensive categories. For 2009, he signed as a minor league free agent with the Atlanta Braves. He spent most of the year at Triple-A Gwinnett, where he hit .269/.358/.422 with 12 homers and 64 RBIs. He has also seen some extended time with the Braves, appearing in 25 games. In 48 at-bats, he is hitting .229/.288/.458 with two homers and eight RBIs.

Wes Bankston: Bankston was another key cog in the 2008 River Cats' line-up and he also made his big league debut with Oakland last season. This year, he was in the Cincinnati chain, where he spent the year with Triple-A Louisville. In 122 games for the Bats, he hit .267/.313/.449 with 17 homers and 75 RBIs.

Kevin Melillo: Melillo was traded by the A's to Toronto in June of last season and spent the rest of that year with Triple-A Syracuse. In 2009, he was in the Milwaukee Brewers organization, where he spent the season in Double-A with Huntsville. In 113 games, Melillo hit .249/.344/.392 with nine homers and 52 RBIs. He didn't play after August 19th when he landed on the disabled list with an injured elbow. Melillo has struggled with injuries since 2007, when he hurt his left wrist.

Brian Stavisky: Stavisky was one of the A's 2002 draft picks. The outfielder/first-baseman from Notre Dame played in the Texas chain last season and he landed with his hometown team, the Philadelphia Phillies, in 2009. In 118 games at Double-A Reading, Stavisky hit .279/.377/.454 with 11 homers and 66 RBIs.

Patrick Currin: Currin, the A's 22nd round pick in 2006, was released by Oakland during the season after he had appeared in 21 games and had posted a 4.93 ERA in 38.1 innings for the Stockton Ports. He quickly landed in the Atlanta

Braves organization and spent the rest of the year in the Carolina League with High-A Myrtle Beach. Currin pitched well for the Pelicans, posting a 3.28 ERA and striking out 20 in 24.2 innings.

Scot Drucker: Drucker, the A's 13th round pick in 2004, was released by Oakland during last year's spring training after missing the entire 2007 season with a labrum injury. He spent the first half of 2008 in the independent leagues, but signed on with the Detroit Tigers late in the year. Drucker appeared in nine games for Double-A Erie of the Eastern League and impressed the Tigers' brass. He spent all of the 2009 season at Triple-A Toledo, pitching mostly in the Mud Hens' starting rotation. In 113 innings, he posted an 8-3 record and a 4.78 ERA with 77 strike-outs and 38 walks. Drucker will be busy this off-season. He was recently added to the Arizona Fall League and after that season is over he will be participating in winter ball in Puerto Rico.

Jesus Guzman: Guzman won the Texas League batting title with the Double-A Midland Rockhounds last season. The A's tried to re-sign the minor league free agent, but lost out to the San Francisco Giants, who gave him an invite to major league spring training. He starred for the Giants in spring training and then hit well for Triple-A Fresno, batting .321/.379/.507 with 16 homers in 115 games. Guzman was added to the Giants' 40-man roster during the season and is currently with the Giants. He has struggled in limited big league action, however, collecting three hits in 18 at-bats. He has moved from third base (where he played with the A's) to first base with San Francisco.

Danny Putnam: Putnam, a supplemental first-round pick of the A's in 2004, was traded to San Diego in June on the same day the A's made the Hairston deal (although it was a separate transaction). Before the trade, Putnam had split the season between Double-A Midland (where he hit .301/.381/.528) and Triple-A Sacramento (.245/.292/.364). With San Diego, he spent the rest of the season with Triple-A Portland, where he hit .249/.349/.444 with six homers and 34 RBIs in 54 games. In total, he hit 17 homers in 2009, one better than his total of 16 in 2008.

James Heuser: Heuser was a big part of the Stockton Ports' 2008 California League championship season. The lefty was promoted to Double-A in 2009, but struggled with Midland and was released by the A's after posting a 6.03 ERA in 37.1 innings. He spent the rest of the season playing for the Lancaster Barnstormers of the independent leagues and he pitched well, posting a 1.84 ERA with 20 strike-outs in 14.2 innings, all in relief.

Jed Morris: Morris was a teammate of Heuser's early in the year in 2008 with Stockton and was a teammate of his again with Lancaster in 2009. Morris, who beat leukemia during his time with Oakland, was the Barnstormers' primary catcher this season. In 102 games, he hit .249/.332/.385 with nine homers and 46 RBIs.

Lloyd Turner: Turner, a longtime A's farmhand, also spent the 2009 season with Lancaster. The utilityman hit .281/.398/.427 with 11 homers and 31 stolen bases.

Matt Watson: Watson, the former A's and River Cats outfielder, left the A's organization in May of 2006 to play professionally in Japan. After one season in the JPL, Watson returned to the States in 2008 and appeared in 76 games for the Blue Jays' Triple-A affiliate in Syracuse. He decided to give Asia another shot at the start of 2009, signing with the Doosan Bears of the Korean Baseball Organization. He returned to the States during the season and signed with the Mets, but was released after only 10 games. He then signed with Lancaster, appearing in 66 games for the Barnstormers. He hit .269/.378/.440 with eight homers in 234 at-bats for Lancaster.

Ben Fritz: Another A's alumnus on the Lancaster roster is Fritz, who was a first round pick of Oakland in 2002. The right-handed pitcher struggled with injuries while in the A's chain. He was in the Detroit chain in 2008, but was released mid-season and landed with Lancaster, where he had a 4.39 ERA in 53.1 innings. He remained with Lancaster in 2009, making 25 starts for the Barnstormers and posting a 4.04 ERA with 92 strike-outs in 142.2 innings.