

A's News Clips, Thursday, October 1, 2009

Buck tries to cash in on shot

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

A's right fielder Travis Buck picked a heck of a time to work his way back into the lineup.

The A's had no answer for Seattle right-hander Brandon Morrow, a Santa Rosa native who allowed just one hit over eight innings as the Mariners blanked the A's 7-0 at Safeco Field on Wednesday night.

Morrow, who starred at Cal after leaving Rancho Cotate High, allowed Rajai Davis' fourth-inning infield single, the A's only base runner through the first seven innings. Morrow also walked two in the eighth.

Buck had one of those walks in an 0-for-2 night. He drew just his second start since being recalled Sept. 19 for his third stint with the A's. He started in place of regular right fielder Ryan Sweeney, who could miss the final four games with knee problems.

Buck broke camp with the A's, but over the course of the season he's slid down the pecking order of outfielders.

"I knew my playing time would probably be limited (when he was recalled this month)," Buck, 25, said. "I was just happy to be back up here."

Buck had an adventurous night in the field. He appeared to have a shot at a sliding catch of Jose Lopez's shallow fly in the second, but the ball bounced to his left and went for a double. He also slammed into the wall going after Michael Saunders' triple in the third.

Buck made the A's Opening Day lineup as a rookie in 2007, but injury problems and inconsistency at the plate plagued his first two seasons. He probably didn't help his cause earlier this season, when he questioned the decision to put him on the disabled list in May for what he considered a minor oblique injury.

Still, manager Bob Geren insists Buck is "right in the mix" with several other outfielders. If Scott Hairston, Davis and Sweeney head into 2010 as the starting outfielders, Buck will be fighting for a reserve spot with a group that includes Eric Patterson, Matt Carson and Aaron Cunningham.

Buck takes heart in the fact he's stayed healthy this season aside from the oblique injury.

"I still think they think really high of me," he said recently. "... Playing through this whole year basically injury-free and having a decent year (in the minors), it's definitely a step in the right direction."

Notes: Sweeney said he has a small tear in the patella tendon in his left knee, but he's battled pain in both knees all season. He'll receive plasma injections in both knees in the offseason to help combat the problem. ... A's starter Clayton Kershaw lasted just one-plus inning Wednesday, as Seattle scored four runs in the first and two in the second. ... Ken Griffey Jr., whose decision on whether he'll retire after the season is a major story line in Seattle, hit a three-run homer for the second straight night against Oakland. ... The A's bullpen allowed one run in seven innings. Henry Rodriguez struck out three in two innings, hitting 101 mph on the radar gun.

Ex-Bear Morrow more than a one-hit wonder?

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Were it not for a tricky bouncer toward the middle and Rajai Davis' speed, former Rancho Cotate High School and Cal pitcher Brandon Morrow might have had a no-hitter spinning into the late innings at Safeco Field on Wednesday.

Davis beat out that grounder, barely arriving at first ahead of the throw from shortstop Josh Wilson in the fourth. That was Oakland's only hit in eight innings against Morrow, and with Ken Griffey Jr. providing his second three-run homer in as many nights, Seattle romped 7-0.

"He was throwing everything first strike," A's first baseman Daric Barton said of Morrow. "You couldn't sit on anything. He's known to be a little erratic, but he was just dominating. The (A's) game plan was to be patient, but the first three innings, he dominated. The whole game, he dominated. He was never in trouble, he never gave in."

Although enjoying a strong September, the A's have dropped their past three games and they have lost 13 of 18 to the Mariners this season.

After Davis' single, the A's didn't have another baserunner until Eric Patterson and Travis Buck walked with two outs in the eighth. Shawn Kelley worked the ninth for Seattle and gave up a two-out pinch-hit single to Landon Powell.

Morrow spent much of the previous two months at Triple A. He hadn't worked more than six innings in any of his nine big-league starts after being moved out of the closer role.

Oakland's starting pitching was not of the same caliber. Clayton Mortensen went only one-plus inning, giving up eight hits and six runs. He allowed four in the first, including Griffey's blast to center after singles by Ichiro Suzuki and Franklin Gutierrez. Ex-A's infielder Jack Hannahan drove in another run with a double.

"Fastball, middle away," Mortensen said of the pitch to Griffey. "You can't go there with him on a 2-0 pitch."

Ichiro had an 11-pitch at-bat in the first, then led off the second with a triple and scored on a hit by Gutierrez.

"That guy is a pain," Mortensen said of Ichiro. "I threw him a whole assortment of stuff. It's frustrating, like, 'Put it in play already.' "

Gutierrez motored to third on Mortensen's wild pickoff throw and came in on a double by Jose Lopez. Brad Kilby took over for two innings, then Jeff Gray pitched the fourth and allowed a solo homer to Adam Moore in the fourth, the first homer of Moore's career.

Ryan Sweeney was out, as expected, because of knee tendinitis that will require plasma injections after the season. Manager Bob Geren said he'd like to get Sweeney back in the lineup before the week is over. Sweeney said the cold weather in Seattle didn't help. Buck was in right, his second start since being recalled Sept. 19. Geren said it will be "mix and match" with Buck and Matt Carson while Sweeney is out.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Old loyalties: Craig Breslow has more than a passing interest in the AL Central race - he played with the Twins before Oakland claimed him in May. "Nobody on the field had anything to do with that decision," Breslow said. "I still have a lot of friends there."

Mortensen hit hard; bats silent in loss

Starter lasts inning-plus; offense manages only two hits

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

SEATTLE -- A night after being assured of finishing in fourth place in the four-team American League West, the A's on Wednesday looked the part in a 7-0 loss to the host Mariners in the second game of a three-game series at Safeco Field.

Oakland's rookie starting pitcher, Clayton Mortensen, had the worst outing of his brief big league career.

The A's offense spent the night flailing at Mariners starter Brandon Morrow's high-90s heat, fanning nine times while not being able to get a runner past first base until there were two out in the eighth inning.

Throw in a couple more errors, giving Oakland 18 errors in its past 10 games, and you've got yourself a forgettable night at the old yard.

"We fell behind early and their guy was on top of his game," A's manager Bob Geren said. "That's usually a bad combination."

Mortensen, a 24-year-old making his seventh big league appearance and sixth start, allowed six earned runs on eight hits before exiting with nobody out in the second inning. Ken Griffey Jr.'s three-run homer to center was the biggest blow, and Mortensen also hit a batter and made a throwing error.

Griffey, who has 18 homers this year, 629 in his career and a pair of three-run shots in this series, has gone deep on 407 different pitchers during his Hall of Fame-caliber career. Trevor Cahill was added to the list Tuesday, and Mortensen made it by grooving a 2-0 fastball that Junior jacked to straightaway center.

"You know the name. You know it's him, and when he steps in the batter's box, you're like, 'Oh, now I'm facing Ken Griffey Jr.,'" Mortensen said. "But then you have to push it back in your mind. ... It was a fastball out over the plate, and you can't go there with him on a 2-0 pitch."

Meanwhile, Oakland's offense had no answer for Morrow, who gave up a fourth-inning infield single to Rajai Davis and nothing else -- no walks, no hit batters, no errors -- until the eighth. Morrow tossed eight innings and struck out nine.

Eric Patterson and Travis Buck drew two-out walks in the eighth before Morrow, who hit 97 mph on the radar gun with some frequency, ended his night by retiring Cliff Pennington on a fly ball to right field.

Landon Powell saved the A's from the indignity of not getting a hit into the outfield when he signed with two out in the ninth before Jack Cust struck out to end it.

"Everything he threw was right around the plate," A's first baseman Daric Barton said of Morrow. "He moved the ball around, in and out, made good pitches when he had to. He threw a great game."

Asked if it was the best he's seen Morrow, Geren said, "Yeah, without a doubt."

Six of the first seven Mariners batters in the first inning reached base as the hosts charged to a 4-0 lead. Ichiro Suzuki tripled to open the second and scored on a single by Franklin Gutierrez, who scored on a popup to right field that fell for a double before Mortensen was pulled from his final start of the season.

"I was falling behind in the count, leaving balls up, pretty much everything you don't want to do," said Mortensen, who gave up seven runs -- three earned -- over 4 2/3 innings his previous time out to snap a two-start winning streak. "A lot of things didn't go my way tonight. Nothing did."

Adam Moore hit a two-out homer off A's righty Jeff Gray, but the bullpen provided Oakland's only highlights.

Rookie lefty Brad Kilby was outstanding after taking over for Mortensen, striking out four and stranding runners at the corners in each of his two innings. Righty Jon Meloan followed Gray with two perfect frames, striking out three.

Meloan (five appearances) has not allowed an earned run since joining the A's this month, but perhaps the most encouraging bullpen outing of the evening came from a rookie who brought a 9.00 ERA into the game.

Petrol-pumping righty Henry Rodriguez, he of the 100-mph fastball and oft-questionable command, breezed through the bottom of the seventh on 12 pitches, striking out two. He picked up another strikeout in the eighth.

"Henry hit 101, pumping strikes," Geren said. "That was impressive."

Sweeney to sit out finale vs. Mariners

Oakland (75-83) at Seattle (82-76), 7:10 p.m. PT

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

SEATTLE -- A's outfielder Ryan Sweeney, nursing sore knees, was held out of the starting lineup Wednesday for the second game of a three-game series against the host Mariners at Safeco Field.

Sweeney probably won't be in the lineup for the series finale Thursday, either.

"He might be out a couple days," said Oakland manager Bob Geren. "But he's a tough guy. If he can get out there, he will."

If he can't, his absence creates opportunities -- for Travis Buck and Matt Carson, in particular.

With thoroughly pummeled Scott Hairston out with hip, back and hamstring issues, Eric Patterson has been starting in left field, and that's not going to change. Hairston isn't expected back this season.

"Patterson's playing really well," Geren said. "He'll be out there."

With Rajai Davis locked in at center field, that leaves Buck and Carson, both of whom spent the bulk of the season at Triple-A Sacramento, as a potential left-right platoon with Sweeney on the sidelines.

"I'll probably mix and match with those two," Geren said.

Pitching matchup

OAK: LHP Brett Anderson (11-10, 4.12 ERA)

Anderson, 21, credits a consistent workout routine with keeping him from wearing down late in the season, and he's looked extremely strong in September. In his penultimate start of the season, he threw 90 pitches -- 60 for strikes -- and improved to 4-0 with a 2.28 ERA in four starts for the month by holding the visiting Rangers to one earned run on six hits without a walk over 5 2/3 innings. Along the way he broke Rick Langford's Oakland rookie record for strikeouts with his 142nd of the season. Anderson has faced the Mariners three times this season, most recently on Sept. 5, when he beat them with five innings of seven-hit work in Oakland.

SEA: RHP Doug Fister (2-4, 4.50 ERA)



The rookie took a perfect game into the fifth inning in his last start before the Blue Jays broke through and saddled him with his third consecutive loss. Fister has shown a penchant for giving up the long ball, having surrendered six home runs in his past four starts and 11 overall in 54 innings. His strikeout-to-walk ratio (32-to-14) is good for such an inexperienced hurler. This will be Fister's second start against the Athletics. He settled for a no-decision on Sept. 6 after holding the A's to one run over five innings.

Dribblers ...

Sweeney is batting .360 with 10 doubles, 19 runs scored and 16 RBIs in 22 games this month, and he's batting .319 with 20 doubles since the All-Star break. ... Geren said he hasn't noticed much of a difference in the bat waggle which Buck worked to tone down during his time in the Minors. "It's not that big of a deal," he said of the pre-pitch movement. "It's more a matter of when you do it, not that you're doing it in the first place." ... Former A's slugger Reggie Jackson, aka Mr. October, will co-host a weekly series on Sirius XM Radio throughout the playoffs called "October Nights." The program, co-hosted by Bill Pidto, will air every Tuesday starting Oct. 6 and run for six consecutive weeks on the satellite carrier's Mad Dog Radio channel.

Up next

• Friday: Athletics (Gio Gonzalez, 6-6, 5.73) vs. Angels (Jered Weaver, 15-8, 3.84), 7:05 p.m. PT 

- Saturday: Athletics (Dana Eveland, 2-3, 7.09) vs. Angels (Scott Kazmir, 9-9, 5.06), 1:05 p.m. PT 
- Sunday: Athletics (Edgar Gonzalez, 0-4, 5.51) vs. Angels (Joe Saunders, 15-7, 4.62), 1:05 p.m. PT 

Coach Alejo has impact on A's health

Players praise program for getting, keeping them well

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

SEATTLE -- The A's brought back Bob Alejo for a second stint as their strength and conditioning coach in part to stem the tide of injuries that had washed away any hope of contention in 2007 and '08.

Oakland used the disabled list 22 times in '07, tying a dubious club record, then shattered the mark by using the DL 25 times in '08.

Alejo, who held the same position with the team from 1993-2001, was hired last winter. The A's have used the DL 17 times this year. He expects that number to drop more dramatically in 2010.

"You have to have a full year of training, and that has to include one offseason," he said Wednesday before the second game of a three-game series at Safeco Field. "We haven't had that yet since I came back, but we will have that by Spring Training. That's when I'll have had a truly full year, and that's when we can start making evaluations.

"I promise you, the best is yet to come."

Several players have credited Alejo's program for keeping them healthy, with young pitchers Brett Anderson and Trevor Cahill tops among them. Others credit Alejo for getting them healthy, as does second baseman Mark Ellis.

Ellis was so pleased with the physical improvements he made while working with Alejo to rehab a strained left calf muscle that forced him to miss two months, he's still on the program, even though he's 100 percent healthy.

"Bob's awesome," Ellis said. "Not only did he get me back, but he made me better, faster. He's incredible at what he does, and everyone on the team knows it."

Told of the praise he's been receiving from the players as the long season winds down, Alejo returns serve.

"They have done an excellent job of committing to the program, and it's not an easy program to commit to; it's hard," Alejo said. "Also, a lot of the guys, the younger guys, had never gone into something this deep, this hard. But they've all attacked it in their own way, and that's a credit to them."

Having many of the team's veterans buy into the program, Alejo added, was a key to getting any hesitant younger players on board.

"That's a major part of it," he said. "Matt Holliday, Jason [Giambi], Orlando Cabrera when he got here, Russ Springer, Elly and now Adam Kennedy, they bought in right off the bat."

Come the start of next season, Alejo promised, the investment will start reaping big benefits.

"This is how we did it the first time I was here, and we were successful, so there's no reason to change that," he said. "We're going to work hard, we're going to get strong, we're going to stay healthy and we're going to be hard to beat."

Morrow shuts down A's offense

Griffey hits 629th career home run, a three-run shot in Mariners' victory

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SEATTLE — Ken Griffey Jr. hit a three-run homer and former Rancho Cotate star Brandon Morrow allowed one hit over eight impressive innings, sending the Seattle Mariners to a 7-0 victory over the Oakland Athletics on Wednesday night.

Griffey's 629th career home run came in the first inning. Morrow (2-4) yielded only an infield single to Rajai Davis in the fourth.

Davis hit a high-hop grounder up the middle, and shortstop Josh Wilson ranged far to his left to snag the ball behind the bag. Wilson made a running, off-balance throw to first baseman Jack Hannahan, who scooped it on one bounce. But the speedy Davis clearly beat the throw.

Morrow threw 105 pitches in the longest start of his career. He tired in the eighth, issuing consecutive two-out walks to Eric Patterson and Travis Buck. Morrow then got Cliff Pennington on a fly to right.

Morrow also set a career high for strikeouts with nine. Previously, his best outing was his first career start on Sept. 5, 2008, when he held the Yankees to one hit over 7½ innings in a 3-1 victory.

Shawn Kelley worked the ninth, allowing a two-out single to Landon Powell.

It was the third time Oakland has been held to two hits this season. It also was the ninth shutout against the A's and the 10th for the Mariners.

Griffey hit his second home run in two nights and his 18th this season. It traveled an estimated 421 feet to straightaway center, just his second to center field this season. The drive came off Clayton Mortensen (2-4), the 407th pitcher Griffey homered against in his career.

Mortensen, making his seventh big league appearance, threw 55 pitches in his one inning plus three batters.

Adam Moore, who entered in the second when catcher Kenji Johjima was removed after being hit on the left elbow with a pitch, had a solo shot in the fourth. It was his first career home run.