

A's News Clips, Saturday, October 3, 2009

Losing A's hope Bailey's a winner

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

As their season winds to a quiet close this weekend, the A's are stepping up the attack for their one chance at postseason glory — landing the American League Rookie of the Year Award for their 22-year-old bullpen wonder, Andrew Bailey.

"I know he's up for Rookie of the Year, but he should be Rookie of the Year," said manager Bob Geren before the A's 5-2 loss Friday night to the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim. "He's been dominant. He's just better than everybody else."

To try to drive home that point, the A's media relations department sent out a comparative statistical evaluation of AL rookie candidates Friday to everyone on their national e-mail list. They did so under the heading "The Case For Andrew Bailey."

The A's players could do their part by giving Bailey a couple more save chances before the season's out Sunday. They lost their fifth straight Friday night, but it's clear where they stand anyway, with all the campaign posters distributed at a recent game taped up throughout the clubhouse.

"Michael Wuertz is responsible for hanging those," said Bailey. "As he says, he's my campaign manager."

It remains to be seen whether Bailey will need extra push. His numbers as the A's overnight-sensation closer speak pretty loudly on their own. In virtually every statistical category except ERA, Bailey's numbers are better than Huston Street's when Street won the award in 2005 pitching on a better team.

Bailey already has surpassed Street's rookie record for saves with 26 saves in 30 opportunities, and he's converted 21 in a row, tied with Street for second-most in Oakland history behind Dennis Eckersley's 40 straight over the 1991 and 1992 seasons. He hasn't blown a save since June 16 against the Los Angeles Dodgers. Since then, Bailey has posted a 1.34 ERA with just eight walks and 41 strikeouts during the streak, which is the longest active save run in the majors.

"I think he deserves it," said catcher Kurt Suzuki, who's had a better view of Bailey's candidacy than anyone. "He's not afraid to throw any pitch at any time, and that's what you want in a closer. But he has other qualities besides his stuff — he's had the mentality from the first day I caught him in spring training."

It's difficult to evaluate this year's rookie field because the top four candidates all perform in different roles. Texas shortstop Elvis Andrus, although posting modest offensive numbers, distinguished himself as one of the best defensive shortstops. Tampa starter Jeff Niemann is 12-6 with a 3.94 ERA while Chicago third baseman Gordon Beckham has 14 home runs and 63 RBI despite not being called up until June 5.

Bailey's emergence in the role was startling, almost unheard of for a pitcher who'd been a starter for his first three years in the minor leagues and never recorded a single save in the minor leagues.

"That's what's so amazing to me, that his first saves were here," said pitching coach Curt Young.

Note: The A's trailed 5-0 entering the ninth before scoring two runs and getting the tying run to the plate, but Mark Ellis struck out and Nomar Garciaparra popped out to end the game against Angels closer Brian Fuentes.

Gonzalez looks ahead to 2010 in 5-2 loss

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

While Angels starter Jered Weaver used his final regular-season assignment as a tune-up for the playoffs, A's starter Gio Gonzalez used it as a final 2009 audition for the 2010 rotation.

Weaver's next appearance figures to be Game 2 of the AL Division Series against the Red Sox. Gonzalez hopes his next outing will be as a member of next year's rotation. While manager Bob Geren said Gonzalez is "definitely in the mix," the lefty's performance in Friday's 5-2 loss showed he has advanced - but with more seasoning required.

Gonzalez collected the most strikeouts (10) and fewest walks (0) in his 24 career starts. His development showed with his fastball command and a plunging curve that prompted batters to swing through pitches low in the zone.

"No walks. That put a smile on my face," Gonzalez said. "That's the last thing I told (pitching coach) Curt Young tonight: no walks."

On the other hand, Gonzalez's lapses were the difference. He surrendered four runs in six innings and dropped to 6-7 with a 5.75 ERA.

In the Angels' two-run second inning, he surrendered hits to three of the first four batters. In the fourth, he fell behind 3-1 to Juan Rivera, who hit a grooved fastball for a home run. In the fifth, he gave up a two-out RBI single to Torii Hunter.

In Gonzalez's defense, one of the second-inning runs could have been avoided if the A's hadn't botched a rundown. Overall, he showed vast improvement from last year, when he was 1-4 with a 7.68 ERA and fresh off the trade that sent him from the White Sox to the A's in the Nick Swisher deal.

"I'm looking forward to 2010," Gonzalez said. "Now that I have three pitches to work with (including a changeup), it's going to be a surprising 2010. Last year, they let me get my feet wet. This year, they gave me an opportunity to pitch. I've built confidence."

The Angels, the first AL West team to win three titles in a row since the 1988-90 A's, are trying not to let history psyche them out. Three times in five years, the Red Sox knocked out the Angels in the ALDS, winning nine of 10 games.

Angels manager Mike Scioscia said Friday of last year's first-round knockout, "We didn't bring our game onto the field." Scioscia calls this year's offense his best since 2002, when the lineup overcame a sizable deficit in Game 6 of the World Series to spoil the Giants' dreams.

Against such an offense, Gonzalez tossed 61/3 scoreless innings in his previous start, a 3-0 victory. But Friday, based on the lopsided strikeout-to-walk ratio, catcher Kurt Suzuki said, "His last start of the season, you could probably say it's his best."

In the eighth, Henry Rodriguez provided drama by twice reaching 101 mph on the stadium radar reading. He threw seven pitches of at least 100 mph, including four in a row with a 3-2 count on Kendry Morales, who fouled off three before taking a walk.

The only run of the inning came on Rodriguez's 101-mph pitch to Gary Matthews Jr., who singled to left.

The A's scored twice in the ninth. Suzuki singled home a run, prompting Scioscia to call closer Brian Fuentes, who gave up an RBI single to Daric Barton. But Mark Ellis struck out, and Nomar Garciaparra popped out, leaving Fuentes with his majors-leading 47th save and the A's with their fifth loss in a row, matching their longest skid of the season.

Henderson Field: The Rickey Henderson Field ceremony is today at 10 a.m. The field, renamed after the Hall of Famer (who'll be in attendance), is on 45th Street between Telegraph Avenue and Webster Street, three blocks from Oakland Tech High School (Henderson's alma mater), which plays its games at the new field.

A's leading off

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

The other guy: Several "Andrew Bailey for Rookie of the Year" posters hang in the A's clubhouse. Maybe Brett Anderson (11 wins, 150 K's) would get some pub if not for Bailey, but Anderson said, "I think he deserves the award. Other guys play every day, but they're not under the same pressure as a closer. He's been lights out."

Jenkins: T'wolves' loss is Warriors gain, right?

Bruce Jenkins, Chronicle Staff Writer

The Warriors' season, as well as the team's future, changed irrevocably after a stunning development on draft night. It makes you wonder: What if the Minnesota Timberwolves had done the right thing?

Given the luxury of the fifth and sixth picks, the T'wolves had a ready-made backcourt at their disposal: **Jonny Flynn**, the classy point guard out of Syracuse, and **Stephen Curry**, the best outside shooter in the country. Not a huge backcourt, granted, but a couple of big names and some dreamy publicity for a team battling irrelevance.

They got the Flynn part correct, then completely fanned on **Ricky Rubio**, who had strongly hinted he'd rather stay in Spain than play in Minneapolis. (Rubio's deal with FC Barcelona will keep him out of the NBA until 2011 at the earliest.) Two picks became one, and the T'wolves face a long wait for the most opportune time to trade Rubio's draft rights.

Curry wasn't going to satisfy the Warriors' need for defense, rebounding or a classic point guard. His arrival would be discouraging news for **Monta Ellis**, who was hoping the Warriors wouldn't draft *any* point guard. But **Don Nelson** was so impressed by Curry's demeanor, scoring ability and pedigree (the son of longtime NBA player **Dell Curry**), he pulled the trigger, anyway.

It says here that Curry will be a stellar NBA player for years, and that he and Ellis might be more compatible than conventional wisdom suggests. But what if Curry had been off the board? It's doubtful that Nelson would have taken Rubio. He wasn't going to turn his team over to an 18-year-old from overseas, and Nelson understands the international scene well enough to know that Rubio had his eyes on New York - and nowhere else - at that point of the draft.

Would that have left the Warriors with **Jordan Hill**, the 6-10 forward everyone expected them to draft? Or one of the intriguing 6-6 guards, **Terrence Williams** or **DeMar DeRozan**? Yet another "what if" entry in the team's chaotic recent history. The best advice for Curry is to hang in there. I'm sure his dad is telling him that. The Warriors' fans are masters of the art.

Wainwright's year

Tim Lincecum will finish the season as the NL's strikeout leader (261), and he allowed 168 hits in 2251/3 innings - sensational numbers. But in the eyes of Cy Young voters, his 15-7, 2.48 won't measure up to **Adam Wainwright's** 19-8, 2.63, or the fact that Wainwright pitched for a winner in St. Louis. That doesn't change the fact that Lincecum is the best pitcher in the league. Too many hitters have confirmed it. They continue to be blown away by the kid's stuff ... Lincecum was masterfully handled by **Bruce Bochy**, whose philosophy falls somewhere between old-school nostalgia and pitch-count madness. Lincecum's body grew weary in some boiling-heat starts, but the arm threw bullets - right down to his very last start Thursday. Nobody in baseball pitched as many as 10 complete games (**Roy Halladay** led the majors with nine), but don't rule it out for Lincecum next season ... With all respect to **Andrew Bailey's** fine season, he's likely to finish fourth in the AL Rookie of the Year voting behind Texas shortstop **Elvis Andrus** (definitely deserves it), Detroit pitcher **Rick Porcello** and White Sox third baseman **Gordon Beckham**. How could people forget about Oakland? Hey, A's management did ... The A's reportedly haven't ruled out a third-base job for **Eric Chavez**, assuming he sufficiently recovers from back surgery, but please: That saga is *so* over. If he even stands a chance to come back, let him do it somewhere else with a fresh start ... Excellent preseason predictions from the 3-Dot Lounge and blog: Arizona wins the NL West, Cubs in the Central, Mets in the East, White Sox in the AL Central, the Yankees are too old, **CC Sabathia** will regret going to New York, **Aaron Rowand** will prove his critics wrong. OK! Did forecast a .338 average for **Pablo Sandoval**, though ... **Jon Miller** pointed out what might be the highlight of **Rich Aurilia's** career: 17 RBIs over three series in the 2002 postseason ... Find me something dumber in sports television than the gyrating robot on Fox NFL games. After such brutal overexposure, who could possibly think that's cool?...Remarkable (but not surprising) news from China Basin: The Giants averaged 35,322 in a recession year ... So if you propose marriage at the ballpark, (a) you'd rather remember 10 seconds of video-board time than a truly private moment; (b) you're too insecure to handle the occasion alone; or (c) you're making it virtually impossible for the person to say no. In any case: Aww, isn't that cute? Actually, no.

A's offense remains stalled vs. Angels

Losing streak hits five despite 10-K effort from Gonzalez

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- After weeks of looking like a young team finding its footing, the A's have gone back to looking like the last-place team that they are.

The suddenly somnambulant offense struggled for a third consecutive night, leading to a season-high-tying fifth consecutive loss, 5-2, on Friday in the opener of a three-game series at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum.

The A's, who entered the set with the third-highest team batting average (.281) in the Majors since the All-Star break, have scored four runs in their past three games and were just swept in Seattle.

On Friday, right-hander Jered Weaver and two relievers gave up four hits without a walk before Oakland rallied for two runs on four hits in the bottom of the ninth.

"I think part of it might be that we were playing so well and wanted to finish like that, so we're going out there thinking, 'We've gotta win this game. We've gotta win out,' instead of just going out and letting things happen," said A's catcher Kurt Suzuki, who went 2-for-4 and pushed his career- and team-high RBI total to 88.

"And part of it might just be that it's baseball," Suzuki added. "We were hot, but Seattle has the best ERA in the American League, and the Angels pitched a great game tonight."

Weaver (16-8) gave up three hits and struck out five over five innings in his final tuneup before the American League West champion Halos head for the playoffs, and A's manager Bob Geren likes the Angels' chances of making a deep run.

"I think they're always a strong contender because they're so balanced," Geren said. "They can do everything. You run into tough pitching in the postseason, but they can manufacture runs; they go first-to-third better than anyone in the game, they steal bases ... they have a nice formula."

A's rookie lefty Gio Gonzalez set a career high with 10 strikeouts over six innings, but he gave up four runs on eight hits in his final start of the season and fell to 6-7 with a 5.75 ERA.

Gonzalez, 24, will be competing for a spot in the back of Oakland's rotation next spring and will spend the offseason looking to improve his composure and command. Walks have been an issue for him most of the year, but he walked one in his penultimate starts and didn't issue any free passes on Friday.

"The positive is no walks," he said. "I was pretty happy about that. That was a good way to end the season."

Mike Napoli's RBI double opened the scoring in the top of the second inning, and later in the frame the Angels went to the formula and pulled off a double steal of home and third. Napoli strayed far off second base on a pitch to Freddy Sandoval, prompting Suzuki to throw to shortstop Cliff Pennington, whose throw back to Suzuki when Kendry Morales broke for home was offline, and Suzuki's whiffed on a swiping tag as Morales hurdled his glove.

Juan Rivera homered to make it 3-0 in the fourth, Torii Hunter added an RBI single in fifth and Gary Matthews Jr. stroked an RBI single off righty reliever Henry Rodriguez in the eighth.

"They put the ball in play and sprayed it around," said Gonzalez, who beat the Angels with 6 1/3 shutout innings of four-hit work last week in Anaheim. "Give 'em credit. They're a good hitting team. That's part of why they're going to the playoffs."

The A's finally gave their die-hards something to cheer in the ninth, getting RBI singles from Suzuki and Daric Barton before Angels closer Brian Fuentes struck out Mark Ellis and got pinch-hitter Nomar Garciaparra to pop out with runners at first and second to nail down his 47th save.

"That's the nature of our team," said A's outfielder Rajai Davis. "We never give up. We're going to be a team to be reckoned with next year."

That might be a stretch, but the A's continued to earn the respect of Angels manager Mike Scioscia, whose team is 10-7 against Oakland this year.

"The last six to eight weeks they've played as good as anybody in baseball," Scioscia said. "They're playing hard, they've got power arms and can close down games."

A's Bailey vying for top rookie honors

Oakland (75-85) vs. Los Angeles (95-65), 1:05 p.m. PT

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Taking a cue from college football programs that crank up their powerful propaganda machines in an effort to hype Heisman Trophy candidates, Major League Baseball teams have recently taken to sending out various communications designed to sway those who vote for the game's big postseason awards .

The Royals, for instance, sent out an impressive little package detailing Zack Greinke's candidacy for the American League Cy Young Award -- including quotes of praise for Greinke from Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu, who has his own Cy Young candidate in Felix Hernandez.

"They made it look like I was promoting *their* guy," Wakamatsu said with a laugh.

The A's haven't gone quite that far, but on Friday they did send out an e-mail following the lead of manager Bob Geren, who has been promoting Oakland closer Andrew Bailey as the AL Rookie of the Year for a month or so.

The e-mail was respectful to the other candidates; no funny business, strictly facts and stats shining a light on Bailey's All-Star season.

Bailey will have a shot at padding his commanding saves lead among AL rookie closers Saturday in the second game of Oakland's season-ending series against the visiting Angels, but as far as Geren is concerned, the race should be all but over.

Catcher Matt Wieters of the Orioles, infielder Gordon Beckham of the White Sox, starting pitcher Rick Porcello of the Tigers and shortstop Elvis Andrus of the Rangers are among those who'll surely get strong consideration from the voters.

"He's dominated at his position more than any other candidate," Geren said of Bailey, who entered the Angels series having converted his past 21 save chances while lowering his ERA to 1.88. "He's been like a machine."

Pitching matchup

OAK: LHP Dana Eveland (2-3, 7.09 ERA)

Eveland struggled against the Angels on Saturday, allowing eight runs, five earned, on five hits over 3 1/3 innings. Eveland also struggled with his command as he walked four batters and struck out just one. But he still was only saddled with a no-decision as the A's erased a seven-run deficit over the next three innings. He'll face the Angels again in Oakland on Saturday, hoping for a better result. He's is 0-3 with a 6.66 ERA in his career against the Angels.


LAA: LHP Scott Kazmir (9-9, 5.06 ERA)

Kazmir has a 2.01 ERA in five starts with the Angels, but they have given him only eight runs while he's been on the mound, accounting for his 1-2 record. He has 23 strikeouts while yielding 25 hits and nine walks in 31 1/3 innings. His fastball command has been exceptional, but he has had trouble getting good bite and location on his slider.

Dribblers ...

Geren on Friday finally conceded what's long been suspected: outfielders Ryan Sweeney (torn left knee tendon) and Scott Hairston (hip, back pain) will not play again this season. ... September callup Matt Carson, a right-handed hitter, started in right field against Angels righty Jered Weaver over Travis Buck, a left-handed hitter, because Buck, according to Geren, was "not feeling well. It's a non-baseball-related illness." ... Backup catcher Landon Powell will make his final start of the season behind the plate Saturday. ... The A's were 1-5 at home against the Angels this year heading into the series. Neither team has swept the other in a set of three or more games since the A's swept a three-gamer in Oakland in 2004.

Up next

• Sunday: Athletics (Edgar Gonzalez, 0-4, 5.51) vs. Angels (Joe Saunders, 15-7, 4.62), 1:05 p.m. PT 

Gonzalez is solid, but A's still reeling

Associated Press

OAKLAND Juan Rivera homered to help Jered Weaver end a three-start losing streak, and the Los Angeles Angels sent the A's to their fifth consecutive loss with a 5-2 victory Friday night.

Torii Hunter had an RBI single for the American League West champions, who won for the fifth time in six games.

Weaver (16-8), having a career year, pitched five scoreless innings in his final playoff tuneup. Having lost three consecutive starts for the first time in his career, the right-hander was sharp from the start. He struck out five and didn't walk a batter for the fourth time this year.

Weaver will follow John Lackey in the division series against Boston, pitching Game 2 at home. Weaver, who turns 27 Sunday, bounced back from a loss to Oakland in his last start Sept. 25.

Gio Gonzalez (6-7) was effective for much of the night, but not as sharp as when he beat Weaver their last time out. Gonzalez struck out a season-high 10 and didn't issue a walk for the first time this season.

Weaver has three more wins than his previous best season in 2007. He also set career highs with 33 starts, 211 innings and 174 strikeouts.

After the A's got on the board in the ninth and threatened, Brian Fuentes entered and gave up Daric Barton's run-scoring single before recording the final two outs for his majors-leading 47th save.

Bobby Abreu stole his 30th base in the eighth, joining the late Bobby Bonds as the only players in Angels history with at least 100 RBIs and 30 steals in the same season. Bonds had 115 RBIs and 41 steals in 1977.

Mike Napoli got caught in a rundown after taking too big a lead off second base in the second inning. During that pickle, Kendry Morales headed for home and jumped over the tag by catcher Kurt Suzuki for the Angels' second run. It was ruled a double steal, and A's manager Bob Geren came out to argue.

A'S NOTES

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Trivia, tailgating and a burning hibachi

By Tim Keown, espn.com, page 2

I guarantee you this: You won't find many people whose best tailgating memories include the 1982 Oakland A's.

In fact, you won't find many people whose best tailgating memories include baseball. Tailgating is a football thing, for the most part, and it's usually associated with coming-of-age rituals like figuring out how much alcohol can be consumed before the game becomes a swirling blur of helmets and scoreboard lights.

So I apologize in advance for the sedate nature of this tailgate memory. It doesn't include hard liquor, accidental or intentional nudity or someone being locked in a trunk.

However, it does include the vision of Jim Rice hitting the hardest ball ever hit (high into the left-field bleachers, off A's reliever Dave Beard, gone before you knew it was hit), and that should count for something. At the very least it should count for more than an afternoon spent with a bottle of Albertson's Scotch.

My tailgate memories also include a '76 El Camino and a hibachi full of hot coals left underneath it by a bunch of 18-year-olds who didn't know any better. And as was the case with most occasions in those days, I believe AC/DC and Van Halen were also involved.

This was the summer of '82, and a group of us that graduated from high school that June decided to semi-adopt the Billy Martin-led Oakland A's.

I don't remember this being a conscious decision. More than anything, it happened because of a season-long contest the A's held that year. You'd call a number and an automated voice would ask trivia questions. If you answered three correctly, you were entitled to two free bleacher seats to a game.

I remember the contest becoming something of an obsession with me. Every pay phone was an opportunity to prove my superiority. Six, seven times a day I'd call. The tickets were secondary to the challenge. In this case, it truly was the journey and not the destination.

I knew way more as an 18-year-old than I do now, and by mid-June I could have wallpapered my room with A's tickets. I knew stuff it probably wasn't healthy to know, and undoubtedly more than the A's expected some kid from Napa to know. All that useless knowledge and sufficient access to a telephone made for a summer that included more Oakland A's baseball than any of us could have anticipated.

Now, where were we? Oh, that's right -- tailgating. So the sad truth of the matter was, we couldn't use all the tickets I'd collected. My haul was the equivalent of four or six season tickets, and since there were only five or six of us with an interest in baseball, and since I was the only one with an unhealthy interest in baseball, and since we could only go when we weren't either working (which seemed like always) or playing summer baseball at the California Veterans Home in Yountville (a place that remains the coolest spot for amateur baseball in the country, and I will listen to no other argument) we could only use my free tickets roughly once a week.

Back in 1982, Rickey Henderson broke Lou Brock's single-season stolen base record.

But when we went to the game, usually in Big Johnny's El Camino and -- if we needed two cars -- my '79 Dodge Colt, there was always plenty of available parking. Back then the A's featured a bad team with a great outfield (Tony Armas, Dwayne Murphy and Rickey Henderson), which means the only difference between that team and this year's team is the outfield. Anyway, we'd sit on the tailgate of the EC, listen to AC/DC or Van Halen and watch the meat cook on the hibachi. We'd rip on people we knew and made up stories about how great it was going to be when we got to college. We didn't know anything about anything, except baseball trivia, but on the tailgate we knew a lot about a lot of things. And the food was good. It helped that I worked in a butcher shop.

On our first tailgating experience (New York strip steaks, Steinlager), we realized the hibachi was too hot to lift into the bed, so we kicked it under the El Camino and went into the game. When we returned to the car after the game, the hibachi was behind the EC along with a note from the person who moved it. I don't remember the exact wording, but it had something to do with the overwhelming gratitude we should feel toward the person who did the moving, because that sweet El Camino probably would have exploded into the Oakland sky if they hadn't.

We didn't make that mistake again, but we made plenty of others. We were all heading off in different directions within weeks, and despite the cliché, these evenings in the Coliseum parking lot felt like a beginning and an end. And if pressed on it, we'll all admit we still have a soft spot for AC/DC, Van Halen and Dave Beard. And to whoever moved the hibachi, Big Johnny thanks you.