

A's News Clips, Monday, October 5, 2009

A's close season with seventh straight loss

By Joe Stiglich, Bay Area News Group

A's players trickled out of the Oakland Coliseum following Sunday's 5-3 season-ending loss to the Los Angeles Angels. The natural impulse might be to flush the 2009 campaign from their memories ASAP.

But 14-year veteran infielder Nomar Garciaparra had some parting advice for his soon-to-be former teammates: Don't forget the feeling of finishing in last place.

The A's pieced together an impressive September, then wobbled to the finish line with a season-high seven-game losing streak.

Garciaparra, a free agent who's certain to leave Oakland, hopes the returning players look at the big picture of a 75-87 season.

"You look at the season as a whole as a disappointing season," Garciaparra said. "You don't look at just the last (part). It takes a full season. Guys have to realize that. You try to take positives from the year, but you realize how bad of a year it was ... That feeling should never leave you going into the offseason."

No Athletic will argue how much room there is for improvement. The A's finished last in the division for the seventh time in their Oakland history, but the first time since 1998.

For just the third time in Oakland history, the A's winning percentage has dropped in three straight seasons.

Sunday featured a fly ball that left fielder Eric Patterson and center fielder Rajai Davis let drop between them. There also was a baserunning mistake by Daric Barton that helped sabotage a two-run Oakland rally that could have been bigger.

The overall play didn't leave manager Bob Geren pleased. But before the game, Geren talked extensively about the development he saw as the season unfolded.

The A's were 31-43 on June 28, but went 44-44 from that point forward.

"I think when we made some midseason moves and gave some of these younger guys a real good chance at playing, they played well," Geren said. "They jelled together. They were a fun group."

Geren touched on a variety of roster issues. He praised Barton's development and improved work habits, calling him the "front runner" for the first base job heading into spring training. Geren also said he'd be comfortable with Cliff Pennington as his shortstop, though Pennington committed his sixth error Sunday in his final 11 games.

Geren said he'd be OK entering 2010 with a starting outfield of Scott Hairston, Rajai Davis and Ryan Sweeney, "unless something happened in the winter where there was some kind of movement or trade."

One of the A's biggest issues this offseason will be whether to re-sign third baseman Adam Kennedy. Geren didn't hide his thoughts on Kennedy.

"I told him, 'You've done so much for us, on the field and off the field, leading by example,'" Geren said. "He's of the most consistent workers I've ever seen."

The A's, in a likely effort to get a last look at potential bullpen candidates, let seven relievers handle Sunday's pitching duties. Brad Kilby started and went two scoreless innings.

"That's one more minor league start than I had," Kilby joked. "They even gave me the opportunity to run in from (the bullpen) if I wanted, but that would have been a little weird."

(bullet)Infielder Bobby Crosby played in what's assumed to be his final game with Oakland.

Crosby is a free agent after this season and has made it clear he wants the chance to be a starting shortstop somewhere. He was the 2004 American League Rookie of the Year, but he was displaced as the A's shortstop this year.

Crosby started at third base Sunday and went 1-for-2 with a run before being replaced by pinch-hitter Adam Kennedy.

"I've had some great memories here," Crosby said. "This is all I've ever known. I'm happy to move forward, but at the same time it's a little weird." Nomar Garciaparra went 2-for-3 as DH, completing what surely will be his only season in Oakland. Garciaparra, 36, is a free agent and he barely played in the second half. He reiterated he hasn't decided on whether to retire. But he added that the thought of Sunday being his last game wasn't on his mind during the game.

"Maybe that's a good thing. Maybe that's telling me something," he said with a chuckle.

(bullet)The A's 135 total homers ranked last in the American League, a first for an Oakland team. But the A's ranked fourth in the majors with 133 stolen bases, their highest total since 1992, when they had 143.

A's notebook: Mortensen arrested on suspicion of DUI

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Mortensen arrested on suspicion of DUI

A's right-hander Clayton Mortensen was arrested Saturday night on suspicion of drunk driving, the team announced in a release circulated during Sunday's 5-3 season-closing defeat to the Los Angeles Angels.

Mortensen, 24, was released Sunday morning from Santa Clara County Jail and made it to the Oakland Coliseum for pre-game drills.

"The A's are aware of the situation and will have no comment until further details are available," the release said.

Mortensen was obtained from St. Louis in the Matt Holliday trade along with third baseman Brett Wallace and outfielder Shane Peterson. He went 2-4 with a 7.81 ERA in six starts with the A's after the trade.

The regret was obvious on Mortensen's face as he addressed reporters after the game to issue a soft-spoken apology. An A's official said beforehand that Mortensen wouldn't answer questions about the incident.

"I just want to apologize — to the A's and my family," Mortensen said. "Calling my Dad this morning was probably the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my life. I'm deeply embarrassed for what I've done, used poor judgement. I can honestly guarantee it'll never happen again, and I'm just really ashamed and embarrassed."

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A's close season with 7th straight loss

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

A promising final stretch of the season ended with a thud for the A's.

Oakland did little in the way of hitting in the last week of the season and dropped seven games in a row to conclude 2009, including a 5-3 loss to the Angels on Sunday at the Coliseum. That's the second-longest season-ending losing streak in Oakland history after a nine-game skid in 1995.

"We didn't swing the bats well and we made some mistakes. That's not the way you want to finish," Oakland manager Bob Geren said. "The last six weeks, we played some good baseball, but this last week was not one of them."

It was the first time the Angels had swept the A's in Oakland since 1997, and the A's went 23-34 against the AL West, their third-worst record in division play. The A's finished 75-87, their worst mark since 1998, and the team's winning percentage (.463) declined for the third season in a row.

"It's tough to be in last place at the end," Oakland second baseman Mark Ellis said. "It was a weird season because we had high hopes coming out of spring training. Obviously, we're looking toward the future."

The A's hit .227 over the final week, and their run total Sunday was their highest in the last five games. Their first two runs came in the second inning, as the team loaded the bases with nobody out against left-hander Joe Saunders. Matt Carson hit a sacrifice fly to send in the first run, but Daric Barton was thrown out on the play trying to tag and go to second. Geren said that Barton perhaps was too caught up in reading the throw home.

Eric Patterson provided a two-out single to send in Bobby Crosby before Cliff Pennington struck out to end the inning.

The rest of the day was a blur of double-play balls and strikeouts. Oakland hit into double plays in the fourth, fifth and sixth innings; and, in and around getting two on in the seventh and one in the eighth, the team recorded five strikeouts. Jack Cust hit into a near double play in the ninth, erasing Barton but reaching second himself on Erick Aybar's throwing error. Cust then scored on a single by Pennington, but Rajai Davis struck out to end the game.

Patterson and Davis allowed a flyball by Chone Figgins to drop between them in left-center in the third; Patterson had called off Davis and then lost the ball in the sun. Geren called it an easy play for either to make.

An Angels run in the sixth came on a balk by reliever Craig Breslow, but neither Geren nor Breslow could figure out where the balk happened. It was the first balk called on the left-hander all year in 77 appearances.

"They said he stepped toward home, but I felt it was called before he even stepped," Geren said.

"I didn't think I did anything different - probably less," said Breslow, who'd looked at the video after the game.

Sunday potentially was the final game in Nomar Garciaparra's major-league career. Garciaparra, 36, went 2-for-3 and finished with a .281 average. He said he didn't even think about the fact that it might be his last game, and he reiterated that he has yet to make a decision about his future.

"I really enjoyed playing with these guys," Garciaparra said "It's a good group of guys for sure, a lot of talent."

Oakland's strength all year was the bullpen, and it was an all-reliever day from start to finish. Andrew Bailey and Michael Wuertz a scoreless inning each to their super seasons: Bailey, a candidate for Rookie of the Year, finished with a 1.84 ERA and 26 saves and Wuertz finished with a scoreless streak of 131/3 innings and a 2.63 ERA.

A's Mortensen charged with DUI

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

A's rookie starter Clayton Mortensen expressed contrition Sunday afternoon after being arrested early Sunday morning in Los Gatos for suspicion of driving under the influence of alcohol.

"First off, I want to apologize to the A's and my family," said Mortensen, who spent the night in Santa Clara County jail. "Calling my dad this morning was the hardest thing I've ever had to do. I'm deeply embarrassed for what I've done and my poor judgment. I can honestly say it will never happen again. I'm very ashamed and embarrassed. ... I'm really sorry for everything I caused."

Mortensen was arrested at about 3 a.m. by a Santa Clara County Sheriff's Department deputy who was checking a car stopped on the side of Highway 17 southbound in Los Gatos, according to Sgt. Rick Sung, a spokesman for the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Department.

The A's put out a release during Sunday's game against the Angels stating that the team was aware of the situation but will have no comment until further details are available. Mortensen, 24, was acquired from St. Louis in the Matt Holliday trade in July, and he went 2-4 with a 7.81 ERA in six starts.

After starter Esteban Loaiza's 2006 arrest for drunk driving, the A's stopped providing alcohol in both clubhouses at the Coliseum and on the team plane, citing liability issues and concern for players' welfare.

In April, Angels starter Nick Adenhardt was killed by an alleged drunk driver after pitching against the A's. Mortensen's former club, the Cardinals, lost reliever Josh Hancock in 2007 when he was killed while driving under the influence.

A's season leaders

Monday, October 5, 2009

Batting average Rajai Davis.305

Home runs Jack Cust25

RBI's Kurt Suzuki88

Wins Brett Anderson11

Strikeouts Anderson150

Good, not-so-good moments for A's

Offseason imports don't pan out, but rookie hurlers emerge

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The idea behind bringing Matt Holliday, Jason Giambi, Orlando Cabrera and Nomar Garciaparra aboard was to give the previously anemic offense enough juice to make the kids on the mound relax a little.

Things didn't quite work out that way.

Holliday never got on track offensively and was traded in July, as was Cabrera. Giambi was even worse, his once-prolific bat making less noise than his creaking 38-year-old body. Only Garciaparra finished the season with the team, but his chronic calf condition limited him all year, turning him into a high-profile pinch-hitter.

A's general manager Billy Beane doesn't regret his attempt to expedite his rebuilding of the team by adding the aforementioned foursome, though. He still said the notion was sound, and so does Garciaparra.

"In my experience," says the veteran infielder, who will again consider retirement this offseason, "when a pitcher feels like he has some room to make a few mistakes, he doesn't make as many."

Rookie left-hander Brett Anderson, one of the pitchers Beane was trying to protect, doesn't quite buy that line of logic, insisting that all pitchers should take the mound in every inning trying to put up a zero and worry not about whatever the offense it up to.

"That's out of your control, anyway," Anderson said. "The only thing you can control is the ball in your hand."

Like most baseball arguments, there is no real right or wrong here. The bottom line is that the young pitchers, for the most part, *did* develop enough to justify the organization's high hopes for them.

Anderson and Trevor Cahill, both 21, reached double digits in wins as rookies. The rest of the rotation, anchored by Opening Night starter Dallas Braden, the old man of the bunch at 26, was similarly green; the A's set a club record by starting a rookie pitcher an MLB-high 115 times.

"Look, we're only going to go as far as our pitching takes us in any given year; you can say that about the other 29 teams, too," Beane said. "And when you look at guys like Brett and Trevor and [23-year-old Vin] Mazzaro, we're talking about guys drafted out of high school. If they'd gone to college, they'd just now be Draft-eligible this year. Given that and the strides that they made and that we made as a team as the year went on, we're pretty pleased."

Record: 75-87, fourth place in American League West.

Defining moment: On Aug. 7, Giambi was released after a hugely hyped -- and even more disappointing -- homecoming stint with the A's, who brought him back as a free agent and built part of their marketing campaign around him. No news conference, no comment from Giambi, just a massive reminder that the season had gone south.

What went right: After limping into the All-Star break with one of the worst records and offenses in baseball, the A's went on a spirited run in the second half that offered hope for a brighter future. Pitching was something of a bright spot all year; the bullpen was outstanding throughout and the rookie starters all showed fairly frequent flashes of brilliance, with Anderson and Cahill leading the way.

What went wrong: Holliday, Giambi, Garciaparra and Cabrera had little to zero impact on the team's on-the-field fortunes, and the A's used the disabled list 17 times. Ace starter Justin Duchscherer (elbow surgery, back, clinical depression) and projected closer Joey Devine (elbow surgery) never threw a pitch, third baseman Eric Chavez (back surgery) lasted all of 30 at-bats, emerging star lefty Josh Outman (elbow surgery) was limited to 14 games, and second baseman Mark Ellis (left calf) spent two months on the DL, to name a few.

Biggest surprise: Rajai Davis' impact on the A's after taking over in center field can't be understated. His exciting, aggressive style energized the offense and made the team infinitely more fun to watch in the second half than it had been in the first. Not bad for a guy who was cut loose by the Giants early last season.

A's have plenty to be optimistic about

Beane also cautions that Oakland is not 'finished product'

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- A's manager Bob Geren tends to paint everything in the rosiest possible hues. His boss, general manager Billy Beane, takes a more balanced view.

Like Geren, Beane was encouraged by his club's strong second half. But he's not about to declare the A's a potential playoff team in 2010, as did a national columnist while Oakland was wrapping up its torrid September.

Beane knows that there's a long list of young players who have thrived in September, jacked up expectations and fallen flat the following year. See: Daric Barton, 2007-08.

So in looking forward to 2010, Beane looks back at 2009 as a whole, resisting the temptation to put too much stock in early-fall frivolity. And while looking back to look forward, he liked much of what he saw.

"To get where we ultimately want to be, we have to fully commit to our younger players," he said. "We have to give them the opportunity to grow, and a lot of them got that opportunity [in 2009], and a lot of them took advantage of it. But to say we're anywhere close to a finished product, I think would be disingenuous."

Beane and his front-office foot soldiers have plenty of decisions to make before Spring Training 2010, some seemingly easy (bringing back arbitration-eligible Michael Wuertz), some seemingly difficult (whether to retain arbitration-eligible outfielder/designated hitter Jack Cust).

Is Cliff Pennington going to be the starting shortstop? Who will close if Joey Devine comes back healthy? Are uber-prospects Chris Carter and Brett Wallace going to be in green and gold?

Beane is understandably reluctant to address such questions.

"The arbitration guys, we're talking about three months down the road," he said. "Those decisions, decisions on our own free agents and others, lineup decisions, we have a lot of time there. What's nice, though, is that a lot of the guys who kind of showed us something this year, the majority of them are under our control and will be for several years."

"So it all goes back to committing to the younger players, and not just the ones we've seen in the big leagues this year, but the guys we hope to see in the big leagues very soon.

"We've made a commitment to this thing, we're going to see it through, and we feel like we're at least heading in the right direction."

Contract issues

Free agents: Justin Duchscherer, RHP; Adam Kennedy, IF; Nomar Garciaparra, IF; Bobby Crosby, IF; Brett Tomko, RHP; Edgar Gonzalez, RHP

Eligible for arbitration: Jack Cust, OF/DH; Michael Wuertz, RHP; Santiago Casilla, RHP; Scott Hairston, OF

Player options: None

Club options: None

Non-tender possibilities: Jack Cust, Santiago Casilla

Catchers

- Kurt Suzuki, .274 BA, 15 HR, 87 RBI
- Landon Powell, .229 BA, 7 HR, 30 RBI
- Eric Munson, .265 BA, 13 HR, 68 RBI (at Triple-A)

Suzuki was the team MVP in 2009 and has led AL catchers in starts for two years running. As a result, Powell, who has been slowed by knee injuries for much of his pro career, will spend part of his offseason working out at first base. Powell also might be in line for a DH role should Oakland non-tender Cust. Munson has plenty of big league experience and would likely have the inside track on the backup role if Powell is converted.

First base

- Daric Barton, .269 BA, 3 HR, 24 RBI
- Chris Carter, .329 BA, 28 HR, 115 RBI (AA/AAA)
- Sean Doolittle, .267 BA, 4 HR, 14 RBI (AAA)

Barton had an opportunity to seize the starting role for the foreseeable future in 2008, but was a flop offensively and spent quite a bit of this season in the Minors. Carter, who likely will be named the organizational Player of the Year for the second consecutive season, is far behind Barton defensively and might get a look in the outfield; his big bat is close to ready for the big leagues. Doolittle's season was shortened (28 games) by injury, but he had a nice spring with the big league club and projects as more of a prototypical corner infielder than does Barton.

Second base

- Mark Ellis, .263 BA, 10 HR, 61 RBI
- Eric Patterson, .287 BA, 1 HR, 11 RBI
- Adrian Cardenas, .299 BA, 7 HR, 79 RBI (AA/AAA)

Ellis is The Man, period, on the strength of his Gold Glove-caliber defense and clubhouse leadership. Patterson also plays in the outfield, but is a solid backup to Ellis. Cardenas likely will open the season in Sacramento, where he played 51 games in 2009 after tearing up the Texas League with Midland.

Shortstop

- Cliff Pennington, .279 BA, 4 HR, 21 RBI
- Gregorio Petit, .244 BA, 5 HR, 32 RBI (AAA)

Former first-rounder Pennington made tremendous progress after being anointed the starter in July. Petit has never gotten a shot at regular playing time in the Majors. The acquisition of a veteran to push Pennington isn't out of the question.

Third base

- Eric Chavez, .100 BA, 0 HR, 1 RBI
- Adam Kennedy, .289 BA, 11 HR, 63 RBI
- Brett Wallace, .293 BA, 20 HR, 63 RBI (AA/AAA)

Chavez, who hasn't played a full year since 2006 and is coming off a second back surgery, is a question mark at best. Kennedy's return is a question mark, too; he's a free agent and shouldn't have any trouble finding suitors. Wallace, the centerpiece prospect of the Matt Holliday trade, needs work defensively.

Outfield

- Ryan Sweeney, .293 BA, 6 HR, 53 RBI
- Rajai Davis, .306 BA, 3 HR, 48 RBI
- Scott Hairston, .265 BA, 17 HR, 64 RBI
- Eric Patterson, .287 BA, 1 HR, 11 RBI
- Jack Cust, .240 BA, 25 HR, 70 RBI
- Travis Buck, .219 BA, 3 HR, 10 RBI

Sweeney is a lock to start. He'll be in right field if Davis, Oakland's breakthrough player of the year, is rewarded for his stellar season with the starting job in center. Hairston struggled with injuries after being acquired from the Padres, but will enter camp as the front-runner in left. Patterson had a monster year at Triple-A Sacramento and can play all three positions (plus second base). Cust is a potential non-tender, but he's led the team in home runs three consecutive seasons and led the team in RBIs in 2007 and '08 and might still have a home in Oakland at DH. Buck spent most of the season in the Minors, but as recently as two years ago the A's viewed him as a franchise cornerstone; he might benefit from a change of scenery. Carter might be in the mix here, too, and prospect Matt Carson was impressive in a late-season callup.

Designated hitter

- Jack Cust, .240 BA, 25 HR, 70 RBI
- Landon Powell, .229 BA, 7 HR, 30 RBI
- Tommy Everidge, .335 BA, 20 HR, 94 RBI (AA/AAA)

Cust has a lock on the spot if he's brought back, and he's not exactly going to break the bank if he heads for arbitration and wins. Powell is a decent option, though. His power production in limited playing time projects to Cust-like numbers over a full season. Everidge raked at every Minor League stop, but struggled (.224/2/7) in 24 games with Oakland.

Rotation

- Dallas Braden, 8-9, 3.89 ERA
- Brett Anderson, 11-10, 4.12 ERA
- Trevor Cahill, 10-13, 4.63 ERA
- Vin Mazzaro, 4-9, 5.32 ERA
- Josh Outman, 4-1, 3.48 ERA

- Gio Gonzalez, 6-6, 5.73 ERA
- Clayton Mortensen, 2-3, 6.08 ERA

The top three names on this list are virtual locks if they're healthy when camp breaks. Outman would have one of the five spots, too, had not his 2009 been cut short by Tommy John elbow reconstruction surgery; he's not expected back until midseason at the earliest. Mazzaro has the inside track on one of the two projected openings, with Gonzalez not far behind. Mortensen, acquired in the Holliday trade, will need a huge camp to break with the big boys.

Bullpen

- Andrew Bailey, 6-3, 1.84 ERA, 26 saves
- Michael Wuertz, 6-1, 2.63 ERA, 23 holds, 4 saves
- Craig Breslow, 8-7, 3.39 ERA
- Brad Ziegler, 2-4, 3.07 ERA
- Joey Devine, DNP
- Jerry Blevins, 0-0, 4.84 ERA, 20 app.
- Brad Kilby, 1-0, 0.53 ERA, 11 app.
- Jeff Gray, 0-1, 2.76 ERA, 24 app.

The back end of the bullpen is potentially dominant, especially if Devine, the projected closer in 2009, returns healthy from Tommy John surgery. Other back-end spots are up for grabs. All of the players on this list are under club control, with only Wuertz due a significant raise as the only player eligible for arbitration.

A's drop seventh straight to close 2009

Third straight losing season ends with club's longest funk

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- On Friday and Saturday, they couldn't score early.

On Sunday, they scored early but made a critical mistake on the bases that rendered another last-gasp charge meaningless.

The results were the same, as were the top and bottom of the American League West throughout the three-game series at the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum that ended with the Angels' 5-3 victory in the season finale for the last-place A's.

Oakland closed out its third consecutive losing season with its longest losing streak of the season, at seven games. The loss also stuck the A's with a losing record at home, 40-41.

"We didn't swing the bats that well and made some mistakes," A's manager Bob Geren said. "Not the way we wanted to finish."

Suddenly, Oakland's encouraging post-All-Star break surge seemed like exactly what some cynics were already calling it: a mirage.

Veteran infielder Nomar Garciaparra, who went 2-for-3 with a walk and scored a run in what might be the final game of his brilliant career, isn't among the cynics. But he's not among those who viewed the team's strong September as a sure sign of better days to come.

Garciaparra considers himself a realist, and this is what he had to say about a 2009 season that featured a franchise-record 161 days spent in last place, including the final 155.

"If you look at the season as a whole, it was a disappointment," said Garciaparra, the only one of four big-name offseason acquisitions to finish the year with the team, outlasting Matt Holliday, Orlando Cabrera and Jason Giambi. "It was an awful season, and going into the offseason, nobody here should be kidding themselves about what a bad year it was. You have to feel that, and hopefully do whatever it takes to make sure you don't feel it again."

The A's have felt this feeling for a while now. Since replacing manager Ken Macha with Bob Geren after losing the 2006 AL Championship Series to the Tigers, Oakland has seen its winning percentage drop for three consecutive seasons and hasn't finished higher than third place in the four-team AL West.

Geren is to cynicism what Archie Bunker was to hearts and flowers, but even Geren wasn't about to sugar-coat what happened in the final week of the season, which included a three-game sweep in Seattle before the Angels came into town to spoil Fan Appreciation Weekend.

"We had some guys struggling at the end," Geren said. "When you look back on the past six to eight weeks, we played some good baseball. This wasn't one of them."

The Angels, who have won the AL West five times in six years, got five solid innings from left-hander Joe Saunders and a home run from catcher Mike Napoli in their 97th win of the regular season.

The A's, after scratching scheduled starter Edgar Gonzalez and declaring the finale an all-hands-on-deck game for its stellar bullpen, started lefty Brad Kilby and got two no-hit innings from the rookie before the rest of the bullpen took over and squandered a 2-0 lead.

"I treated it just like I was coming into a game [instead of starting it]," Kilby said. "I don't know if you noticed or not, but I didn't start warming up until 12:58 p.m., after the national anthem. But it was pretty fun."

Oakland got a sacrifice fly from rookie Matt Carson and an RBI single from Eric Patterson in the second inning, but they blew a shot at a bigger inning on Carson's sacrifice fly. Daric Barton, trying to tag up from first on the play, was doubled off after the throw from the outfield went through to the plate and Napoli fired down to second.

"That's a mistake," Geren said. "He hesitated a little bit, and it cost him."

Napoli's homer off Jerry Blevins in the third started a comeback that included a three-run fifth against righty Jeff Gray. The lead went to 5-2 when Craig Breslow was charged with a balk in the sixth, and the A's trimmed it on an RBI single by Cliff Pennington with two out in the ninth.

Rajai Davis, who collected his 27th double and finished the season with a team-high .305 batting average, struck out to end the game.

Garciparra, 36, said he hasn't decided if he's going to play next year, but it almost certainly will not be with Oakland. Thus, the fans behind the home dugout gave him a nice ovation after he struck out in his final at-bat.

"I'm not going to make an emotional decision on [next year] right now," he said. "Right now I'm happy the season's over, but sad because the season isn't continuing. I'm always sad when my team doesn't make it to the postseason. But I really enjoyed playing here. Great bunch of guys and a lot of good young talent."

Asked if it dawned on him at any point that his career might be coming to an end with a fairly meaningless game in Oakland, thousands of miles away -- literally and figuratively -- from the white-hot spotlight of Boston in which he thrived for the first nine years of his 14-year career, Garciparra played coy.

"I didn't even think about that," he said before breaking into a sly smile. "Maybe that's telling me something. I don't know."

Athletics award Bill King Scholarship

Local collegian receives grant honoring late broadcaster

By Cecile Nguyen / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Although the legendary broadcaster and former A's radio play-by-play voice Bill King passed away four years ago, the Oakland Athletics continue to honor his memory. On Sunday afternoon, they presented the third annual Bill King Scholarship to Justin Riray, a senior at San Jose State who is studying broadcast journalism.

King's former partners on the air, Ray Fosse and Ken Korach, were on hand to present the \$3,000 scholarship to Riray before Sunday's game against the Angels.

"My dad listened to Bill King on the radio a lot and talked to me about him," said Riray. "Earning this scholarship means a lot to me because it's from one of my favorite Bay Area sports teams. This one's special."

With the cost of tuition on the rise in a majority of colleges across the nation, Riray said the scholarship comes at a good time. He said he contemplated taking a semester off from his studies at San Jose State in order to work full-time to earn enough money to pay for his classes.

"My mom didn't want me to take a semester off," the Pittsburg, Calif., native said. "This scholarship will help pay for most of next semester and it means a lot to my family, too."

"The scholarship is a tremendous idea," said Korach, who worked with King for 10 years. "Anything the A's can do the help young people is good, and to have it in the name of Bill is great. It's a perfect tribute. Anything to continue his legacy is a great thing."

King, who popularized catch phrases like "Holy Toledo" in the Bay Area, spent five decades thrilling fans with his vivid and colorful descriptions of some of the most historic moments in the annals of three of the Bay Area's major sports teams. King served as the play-by-play voice for the A's for 25 years before passing away on Oct. 18, 2005, at the age of 78.

The Bill King Scholarship fund was established in 2006 and will award scholarships annually to college students in the Bay Area majoring in broadcasting or journalism. Interested candidates can request an application by contacting Detra Paige, A's community relations director, by phone at 510-563-2241 or via e-mail at dpaige@oaklandathletics.com. Candidates must be full-time students in their sophomore, junior or senior year at a college or university in the Bay Area, prove financial need as evidenced by expenses and offset by other scholarships, loans, grants and other sources of supplemental aid, possess a minimum grade point average of 3.0 and show a demonstrated strong interest in pursuing a career in broadcasting or journalism.

Funds for the Bill King Scholarship were raised through the sale of commemorative Bill King "Holy Toledo!" patches (\$20) and pins (\$10) and are currently available at oaklandathletics.com or by calling 510-563-2329.

Prior to joining the A's, King was an announcer for the San Francisco/Golden State Warriors from 1962-83 and for the Oakland/Los Angeles Raiders between 1966-92. He was one of the few announcers who balanced play-by-play duties with three major sports franchises simultaneously; doing so for a three-year period in the early '80s.

The renowned broadcaster first began his career as part of the Armed Forces Radio Network while being stationed in Guam at the end of World War II. King then embarked on a sports career in the late 1940s. He covered Minor League baseball and high school basketball and football in Pekin, Ill., before moving to the Bay Area in '58, when he started at KSFO radio and joined Ford Frick winner Lon Simmons and Russ Hodges as part of the San Francisco Giant broadcasts.

A's fans have the chance to vote for King's candidacy for the National Baseball Hall of Fame by voting for the Ford C. Frick Award.

For the seventh straight year, online fan balloting will be used to help determine the final ballot for the Ford C. Frick Award. Fans voting will determine three of the 10 candidates for the 2010 honor. Online voting runs from Dec. 1-31, and fans can cast their votes once per day for up to three baseball broadcasters, exclusively at www.baseballhall.org.

The Frick Award has been presented annually since 1978 to a broadcaster who has made a major contribution to the game of baseball. King came out on top on the fan online balloting for the award in 2005 and '06 and finished second behind former Cincinnati Reds' broadcaster Joe Nuxhall in '07.

The final ballot will be comprised of three fan selections, along with seven other candidates determined by a Hall of Fame research team. The electorate will then vote, and the 2010 Ford C. Frick Award winner will be announced in February and will be presented at next summer's annual ceremony in Cooperstown.

Angel pitcher's shot in the arm guns down A's

Associated Press

Joe Saunders got a shot for his ailing left shoulder in August and has felt great ever since.

Saunders pitched five effective innings, Mike Napoli homered and the Los Angeles Angels closed out an impressive regular season with a 5-3 victory over the A's on Sunday.

The American League West champions swept the three-game set against the A's and will host the Boston Red Sox in Game 1 of their division series Wednesday or Thursday.

Saunders (16-7) allowed two runs and six hits as the Angels marked their 100th day in first place.

Saunders improved to 7-0 with a 2.55 ERA in eight starts since he was activated in August following a stint on the disabled list for left shoulder irritation, a problem he began to experience during spring training.

"I took the shot and it cleared the knot out," he said.

"Since then I've told myself to come back strong and show them I can do what I can do."

Erick Aybar had three hits for Los Angeles (97-65) in the regular-season finale. Bobby Abreu, Torii Hunter and Kendry Morales each drove in a run.

Eric Patterson had two hits and an RBI for last-place Oakland (75-87), which lost its last seven games of the year.

Jeff Gray (0-1) gave up three runs and three hits in 1 1/3 innings.

"It wasn't the way we wanted to finish," A's manager Bob Geren said. "We made too many mistakes at the end. This last six or seven weeks we've played some good baseball. This past week was not one of them."

Ervin Santana followed Saunders with two scoreless innings, striking out the side in the seventh.

Darren Oliver worked the eighth and Kevin Jepsen got the final three outs for his first career save.

Nomar Garciaparra collected two hits in what was likely his final game in an A's uniform. He received a standing ovation after he struck out in the eighth.

Napoli led off the third with his 20th homer and the Angels added three runs in the fifth to take a 4-2 lead.

Abreu had a run-scoring groundout, Hunter added an RBI double and Morales singled in the final run.

Napoli also scored on Craig Breslow's balk in the sixth.

Matt Carson had a sacrifice fly and Patterson hit an RBI single to give Oakland a 2-0 lead in the second. Cliff Pennington had singled in a run in the ninth.

Billy Beane Exclusive Athletics Nation Interview: Season End 2009 Part I

Tyler Bleszinski, Athletics Nation, 10/5/09

The A's did make some strides forward in 2009 despite finishing with nearly an identical record the past three seasons. They have a good core of young players who appear primed to only get better, and despite the last week of stumbling baseball, the team was one of baseball's surprises in the second half.

With Brett Anderson, [Trevor Cahill](#), [Gio Gonzalez](#), [Brett Wallace](#), [Daric Barton](#), [Rajai Davis](#) and the rest of the team coming back with more experience, 2010 is looking up for us green and gold faithful. Billy Beane is exceptionally busy wrapping up the season and already starting to look ahead, so I appreciate him taking the time out to chat with me this past week. This is the first part of the interview. I will be running the second part first thing Tuesday morning. Enjoy.

★ ★ ★

Blez: When I talked to you in spring training it looked like you felt like this team could've gone either way. You were hesitant to say it was going to excel. You didn't seem to know what you were going to have.

Billy Beane: If you point to something right away, we had so many young and unproven starting pitchers in the rotation. You just didn't really know how they were going to react and it's hard to predict where you're going to go if you don't know where your pitching is. I think when we spoke it was right around the time when we were just becoming aware of some of the injury possibilities that ended up happening. The two most obvious were Duchscherer and [Joey Devine](#). When you have so many rookie pitchers getting their first taste of the major leagues, it's very difficult to predict where you're going to go.

Blez: What would your assessment on 2009 be then? We're closing in on the final week of the season here.

Beane: It almost feels like two different seasons. I'm very pleased with the second half. I think we've played pretty well and we've surprised some people because we've played so well in particular after some of the bigger name players weren't here anymore. In particular the Holliday trade, and we've made other changes. But I think the most encouraging thing has been the way we've performed in the second half as well as the development of some of these players who I think are going to be here for a long time, which was first and foremost our goal this year. It's been the last couple of years that we've been trying to build that foundation of young talent that people can look forward to seeing for the next few years and creating a winning core for the foreseeable future. For the first time you really started to see that. You can look at some of the young players like Andrew Bailey who made the All Star team as a closer. Certainly Brett Anderson's performance and Trevor Cahill's improvement. Gio (Gonzalez) has made progress this year. Raj Davis, on the offensive side, has come on and shown himself to be a really good major league centerfielder. Ryan Sweeney as well as Kurt Suzuki's continued development and I know I'm going to leave people out. Cliff Pennington has performed very well in the second half. I think if you look around the diamond you'll see that these guys are going to be here for a while and they've proven over the second half that they can perform at the major league level. And as we continue to add guys from our minor league system, guys who are highly thought of, you can start to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Blez: You mentioned people being surprised that the team picked up and became a better team when you ultimately traded away or got rid of some of the "name" guys like Holliday, Giambi and Cabrera. Some of those guys we all expected more from at the beginning of the year. Is there a point where you might've said, "Maybe instead of bringing in some of those guys, maybe I should've just started with the youth at the beginning of the year and perhaps they would've matured and gotten to that point?"

Beane: That's a good question. Personally I always like the idea of if you're trying to rebuild to just got full bore and do it. But there's also a balance as well. In fairness you have to understand a guy like Cliff Pennington probably benefitted from going back and starting the year in Triple-A. What we've seen this year even relative to last year is that he was much more ready to come up this year and contribute than last year. I don't think you could say that that would've been the case in April. But it's a fair question and certainly one that you think about. I do think there is something to be said about having some of those older guys in here so as not to put the pressure on those younger guys to perform. When we made some of these trades to make the commitment to the younger guys it was a different point in the season and I think it allowed them to relax and realize they were going to be able to play every day. They would realize they could make a mistake and still be in there. I'm not sure that that would've been the case had you started that way from the outset. You might've had a different mindset from the younger players. Keep in mind that some of the holdover guys are young too. Those players are different ones than they were in April. Even though we see Kurt Suzuki as the established guy, he's a guy that continues to improve as is Ryan Sweeney. I think having some of those veteran guys gave them the opportunity to continue some of that development. When the baton was handed off to them, they were more prepared than they were in April.

Blez: You were talking about some of those veteran guys you traded away. And obviously it hurt the team quite a bit that Matt Holliday didn't come close to his career numbers with the A's. There was speculation on AN, everything from he knew he was a short timer here in Oakland so he didn't care, to league adjustment, to the adjustment to not being at Coors Field. Why do you think he didn't come close to what he's doing now in St. Louis?

Beane: The first thing I can put to rest is that he didn't care because that was absolutely not the case. Matt was an absolute professional here. If anything he was probably guilty of putting too much pressure on himself than people know publicly. Matt had impeccable work habits and was a pro. There was probably a bit of an adjustment period. But keep in mind even right before he went to St. Louis, he was really starting to get going here.

Blez: His numbers definitely were going up before he was dealt.

Beane: Yeah you could see he was starting to feel more like himself and get it going. The fact that he took off when he went there was not a surprise. Certainly the lineup to hit in around Pujols, I think it became a perfect environment for him. I think had Matt stayed here he would've returned to his career numbers and I think he was headed that way before he left. I can tell you this. He was an absolute professional when he was here and any assertion that he didn't care is not true.

Blez: How do you find enough at bats for someone like Landon Powell who seems like he should get more regular playing time? Do you go into the offseason thinking about how you get more time for him despite the fact that Kurt Suzuki is a fantastic catcher, does a great job with the pitchers and is great offensively? Do you start to look at DH or a different position?

Beane: There's been times where Bob (Geren) has tried to do that. Early in the year he played a few games at first base and it's not something everyone can do immediately on an everyday basis. The other thing too is there were times that Landon was slowed down because he had nagging hamstring issues at different points during the season. Even though there are times when Bob wanted to get his bat in the lineup, Landon's body wouldn't allow him to. One of the

things we're going to focus on with Landon is making sure he's as physically prepared as possibly to handle even more than he has. But we see it as a good problem to have. To be able to put in a catcher behind Kurt who has the ability to hit the ball out of the ballpark but is also a good defensive catcher is a great luxury to have. But the fact is, and you alluded to this, Kurt Suzuki is one of the top catchers in the game. Not only that but he's very much become a leader on the team so he's going to get the bulk of time, yet we are aware of the amount of production Landon has given us in his brief amount of time. I think the goal is ultimately to get him more at bats, but for the time being, Kurt is going to get the bulk of them. Part of Landon's responsibility is to make sure he can handle more playing time than he has because that hasn't always been the case this year.

Blez: When someone like Rajai Davis has what looks like a "career year," how do you assess whether a reasonable projection for next year is more like what he's doing, or more like what he's done before? How does the team go about trying to figure this out?

Beane: In some sense you have to take it at face value. He was with Pittsburgh and then San Francisco and now us. He's never really been given a full blown opportunity to prove himself as an everyday player and now that he is putting up the numbers he is, the first question is, can he keep this up? But if you go back and look at what Raj did in the minor leagues, he was a good minor league hitter so it shouldn't come as a total shock. You're not talking about a guy who was a .220 hitter in the minor leagues. He was a good player when he played. Right now we just see it as a guy who has hit well in the minors who has finally been given the opportunity and is carrying it forward. We're going to enjoy it and go with it and try not to overthink. Anyone who has seen Raj with us over the last year and three quarters, when he's played, he's played well. He's one of the unique major league players who continues to just get better. We're going to take it at face value and he's done enough to show that he's a good enough player to play every day at center field. He's such a weapon on the base paths and he gives you such a unique dynamic. If you look at the stolen bases he's had without even having a full season, it isn't out of the question that next year you could see stealing 65-70 bases.

Blez: You reference stolen bases and obviously it's something that has changed quite a bit about the A's. I think you're in the top three in stolen bases and Raj is one of the league leaders in that number and he really makes the overall team number larger. Did you make a decision to be more aggressive on the base paths because of the lack of power? Did you think, we've got to get some offense some way?

Beane: I really think it's Bob (Geren) trying to take the personnel he has and trying to do the best he can with it. He's playing to the strengths. We don't have a lot of power and it's certainly something in order to be a more complete offensive team it's something we need to get. In a perfect world you have both guys who can steal bases and guys who can hit it out of the ballpark. As much as anything, it's Bob really trying to take advantage of what he has. Early in the year we were having trouble scoring runs and he wanted to create a mindset of being aggressive and when you have a guy like Raj doing it the way he's doing it, it has a tendency of rubbing off on everybody. There's a sense of confidence guys have when they get on the bases and they look to steal bases. They're looking for that steal sign. It also has a carryover effect with the rest of the base running. We've been by and large a very good baserunning team and it was just a matter of Bob looking at his personnel and he thought that this is what we're going to have to do to scrape some runs out. The second half we've actually swung the bats really well also and if you combine that with the aggressive baserunning, that's why you're seeing a lot higher run totals. The one thing it really has done is just given the guys a more aggressive mindset. They realize they're not going to win a whole lot of ballgames by getting into home run hitting contests. I give a lot of credit to Bob and his staff as they've really scratched and clawed their way through nine innings of these games.

Blez: Two questions. Do you believe in that the stolen bases must be a 75 percent success rate or higher or it's counterproductive and second of all, do you believe that someone like Rajai Davis actually puts additional pressure on the pitcher? The assumption is that the opposition pitcher somehow loses that concentration because they're so worried about the baserunner stealing.

Beane: There is no question that if a guy like Raj gets on base, everyone is aware that he is on base and there is going to be some adjustments to how quickly the pitcher might deliver the pitch and the catcher might call for a different pitch than he otherwise would. So the game calling might change as well. I'm sure you could quantify it. I'm not aware of exactly how to, but you can certainly tell from a game situation how teams react differently if you're willing to steal a base so I do think it does have an impact. The Angels have certainly done that for years and I think it's had an impact on how teams play them. It creates a tense situation for not just pitchers and catchers but defenders because they have to come up with a perfect play. As far as the rate, there is certainly a point where if you're constantly running and constantly getting thrown out it's definitely having an adverse impact and the demarcation line certainly seems to be around that 70 percent area. You also have to keep in mind that it doesn't take into account some of the things teams are doing to adjust to a team that runs a lot.

Blez: Do you think that the stolen base has become a bit of an unvalued commodity in baseball considering how few there are now, especially in the American League, compared to years past?

Beane: What I think I've noticed more than anything is that a lot of the teams that are running have sophisticated coaching staffs and sophisticated ways to apply the running game, and I might not be accurate and this is just my impression, but those teams seem to be successful more often. The percentage at which they are stealing bases just seems to be higher.

Blez: The Rays are a good example from last year.

Beane: The Red Sox, who historically haven't been a running team the last few years, specifically with (Jacoby) Ellsbury at the top of their lineup. Yet they also seem to steal at a very high rate too. I think everyone is just trying to take advantage by making a percentage play as well. That's why the success rate seems higher. It just seems very much a part of the strategy as opposed to just indiscriminate running for the sake of doing it.

Blez: We talked about Raj and his career year. This is similar to that. Does Daric Barton seem like he's finally arrived or do you need to see more than a month of red-hot hitting, especially given that he's done that before?

Beane: I knew I'd forget somebody earlier and Daric has, certainly this last month, been swinging the bat the way we knew he could and very similarly to the first month he came to the big leagues a couple of years ago. One thing to keep in mind with Daric is that he's still extremely young. He came up at an age when many kids are still in college. He needs to be given the benefit of time and we need to do that. Through no fault of his own, he's had a few nicks here and there that have kind of interrupted his development. The biggest thing is this guy has been a very, very good minor league hitter and at times has shown that he can be a very good major league hitter. With young players, you just can't expect they're always going to be Andrew Bailey where they step on a mound and they never look back. Daric's development path is not unlike a lot of successful major leaguers where he shows you something and maybe he goes through some difficult times. That just means we have to be patient and hope that the guy that you saw in the minor leagues ultimately becomes that guy at the major leagues. This last month Daric has made some huge strides and we're not just excited about next year, but the next five or six years. The other thing you can't forget about Daric is how good a defender he has become. This is a converted catcher in the minor leagues. He's become a very good defensive first baseman, not just with the glove, but when needed, he throws very well from that position too. We're excited and it's great to see. We've always had high hopes for Daric particularly after that first month at the big leagues. He's one of the reasons we've played so well.

Blez: Staying with the first baseman theme, you have Barton, Doolittle and Carter as potential first basemen, but Doolittle and Carter also have some OF experience. What does the first base depth chart look like right now, and which of the players might be more likely to end up elsewhere on the field?

Beane: It's a question we may face and face very soon. We played Chris Carter a little in the outfield in Double-A. He's a good athlete. In a perfect world, all those guys become very good major league hitters and you have to find a spot for them. It potentially is something we're going to face. We're going to have to make a decision and it will be made on production first and foremost. Secondly, as you mentioned, it might be based on somebody's ability to play another position. In Chris' case we started to play him some in the outfield and I've even talked to his agent as he's going to play winter ball in Mexico and we've talked about getting him out there as much as possible because we think he's a good enough athlete to do it. We were doing the same with Doolittle in Triple A this year before he had the knee issue. It is definitely something as we go into the offseason and spring training we're going to have to prepare for.

Blez: Would the power potential for the position have a big deciding difference in who you play at first base? It's obviously still a concern with Daric because he hasn't put up much in terms of power numbers, but Carter has and Doolittle has some pop as well. Or do you maybe weigh the defense first?

Beane: Being a regular major league baseball player, the player brings a lot of elements: it's his baserunning, it's his fielding, it's his power, it's his ability to hit for average and it's when you add those things together usually one player is going to be better than the other even if he's deficient in one area because he may do one thing very well. It's not something we have to answer yet and it's definitely getting closer. We think all these guys are major league players, it's just about finding a spot for them.

Blez: What will most determine the timeline for when Chris Carter is called up to Oakland? Could he win a job out of spring training if he looks ready?

Beane: It's probably a little early to answer that. The only thing I'll say is that we wanted to give Chris some time at Triple-A and give him some confidence going into next year thinking he's seen the highest level of the minors and he could perform there. I think he did a great job in the few weeks he was there. It's just too early to answer that. I don't like creating definites at this point when you don't need to. A player usually decides when he's ready for the major leagues by performing at the highest level and at that point there's nowhere for him to go but up. Some of these guys are getting close to that.

Blez: Based on what you have seen so far, what's the current thinking on Brett Wallace's chances of being a major league every day third baseman?

Beane: We're going to leave Brett over there. He's played one full season, a total of a season and a half of professional baseball as he's moved very, very quickly because of his bat. We're going to give him the benefit of some time over there defensively and particularly given the long-term need we're going to have at that position, it would behoove us to give him every opportunity to give him the development time defensively to see if he can play the position because it would definitely be a great fit if he can play third base in the big leagues based on the personnel we have here and have coming up. It would be absolutely perfect. Especially given that Chavy ([Eric Chavez](#)) is coming into the last year of his contract, the chance that Brett with some further refining would be a very nice fit for us there long term. I guess the question is, is it still a work in progress? And we're going to give him every opportunity to prove he can play that position.

Blez: What do you do about third base, at least short term? I'm not even sure where Eric Chavez stands at this point or if he's a part of the conversation. I've read reports that he could do permanent damage to himself if he plays again. Where does Eric stand right now?

Beane: From a rehab standpoint, he's doing very well. The good thing about him having surgery when he did is that when we get into the offseason, he should have as normal an offseason as any other player. He should be able to start resuming normal baseball activities when everyone else starts. The time that he's had has been good. I think we have to be realistic including Eric because he's faced a number of surgeries and he's been more disappointed than anyone that he hasn't been able to come back completely. We have to be realistic on him coming back and have some short-term preparation as it applies to that position going into next year. I also think that Eric, given his talent level, deserves the respect and the opportunity to get healthy and given the opportunity to get back to doing what he does best. In short, we're going to try to prepare for both sides of the equation.

Blez: Where does [Travis Buck](#) stand with the team now as he seems to be caught in an almost purgatory state now between Triple-A and being up with the team but not really seeing much regular playing time? Is it the type of thing where he needs to get in there for a while to get his confidence back as he's seemed to have hit well in Triple-A?

Beane: The one thing about major league baseball is that it's pretty Darwinian. If you hit, you're going to play. Raj is probably the best example of that. When Raj got a chance to play he hit. Since he's been playing, he's looked around saying I'm not going to let anyone else play because I know I have to perform here in order to keep myself in the lineup. Most recently, Ryan Sweeney has done the same thing. With all players, not just Travis, it's ultimately going to be based on performance. Travis has had a couple of years in a row, unfortunately, where he's had concussions that haven't enabled him to even play regularly at Triple A. He's missed some time there because of these injuries. We still think very highly of Travis for the same reasons that most people did when he first came up. We think he's got the talent to be a good major league player. At this point it's when he's given the chance he has to take advantage of it and ultimately hopefully avoiding some of those injuries he's had the last couple of years. But we still think very highly of him and one of the best things about Travis is that when he first came up one of the areas we wanted him to work on was his defense and that was addressed to him and he did. He's improved significantly in the outfield and it was an area of weakness when he first came up. Ultimately when he gets to this level it will be based on performance.

Coming tomorrow: Beane delves into the pitching, the status of the injured A's pitchers and how he sees 2010 shaping up.