

A's News Clips, Friday, October 16, 2009

One of the best teams ever

Bruce Jenkins, Chronicle Staff Writer

Spring training brought its usual spirit of renewal in 1990, but it wasn't the same around the A's camp. In a sense, the ground was still trembling. Oakland had just won a World Series interrupted by earthquake, rendering more trivial matters insignificant against the burden of recovery.

At the sight of Dave Stewart, you pictured him helping victims amid the rubble of the Nimitz Freeway. A glimpse of Terry Steinbach and you were back at Candlestick as he held his wife, Mary, so tightly on the field. Even the most notable game details seemed vague, to the point where the first two games (in Oakland) were - and remain - a virtual blank.

This became the forgotten World Series, never to gain its proper recognition. Combine the fateful Oct. 17 with the latter-day stigma of steroids, and you have an A's team struggling for a place in history - although it's hardly a mystery in this corner. Without hesitation, I rank the '89 A's among the five greatest teams in history.

Funny thing about those "top five" lists. They tend to expand, uncontrollably. Can a surfer really isolate his five best waves? Would a jazz aficionado be able to stop after naming five great sax solos? How about your five favorite songs, or movies? It's the top five, and it's 38-deep.

In baseball, any such examination begins with the 1927 Yankees of Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig and so many more. The 1937 Yankees won 102 games with Joe DiMaggio, Gehrig and Bill Dickey at the heart of things. Somewhere in the 1950s, you'd have to pinpoint a Yankee team that so dominated the decade - to say nothing of the 1961 version that won 109 games.

Venturing into modern times, I'd include the 1967 Cardinals, the 1970 Orioles, the 1973 A's, the 1976 Reds, the 1984 Tigers and the 1986 Mets. So much for a top-five ceiling. I just know that if I had Stewart pitching and Dennis Eckersley fresh in the bullpen, I'd take my chances with the '89 team against anyone.

They simply had no weakness. Rickey Henderson stands as the greatest leadoff hitter of all time, and nobody ever had a better playoff series than Rickey in the '89 ALCS dismantling of Toronto. Jose Canseco and Mark McGwire were Bunyanesque power hitters. Dave Henderson had established a living legend with his clutch hitting and defensive play, and invaluable designated hitter Dave Parker was wrapping up a career that may yet find him in Cooperstown.

Highly respected third baseman Carney Lansford hit a robust .336, then a combined .444 (12-for-27) in the postseason. Steinbach was a heady, all-around catcher and a two-time All-Star. Walt Weiss was an acrobatic shortstop coming off a Rookie of the Year season in 1988, capped by a solid ALCS against Boston (singling home the winning run off Lee Smith in Game 2). For the pure act of picking up a ground ball, nobody in history did it better, or smoother, than second baseman Mike Gallego - although the A's often used Tony Phillips there for more hitting.

Stewart was a 20-game winner (21) for the third straight year, and with Mike Moore, Storm Davis and Bob Welch behind him, the A's became only the third team in 60 years to have four starters with at least 17 wins. The advance scouting team, led by Ron Schueler, crafted uncanny preparation for each opponent. Manager Tony La Russa was at the peak of his powers, and although people resented his calculated use of an extended bullpen - "creeping La Russa-ism," as the Boston Globe's Bob Ryan sneered - the strategy was executed to perfection with Rick Honeycutt and Gene Nelson setting up Eckersley.

As the Steroid Era unfolded and Canseco unleashed his ever-so-brutal revelations, critics were not kind to the '89 A's. They ripped La Russa for defending McGwire, and the team's weight-training obsession, so fiercely. The team became identified by that one thing - rampant steroid use, punctuated by the team-wide "forearm bash" - and if that's how people want to remember the A's, that's their right.

I'd prefer to recall more basic memories: a Steinbach throw, a Rickey slide, a Lansford single to right, a neatly executed relay, and particularly the last play of that World Series, wrapping up the four-game sweep at Candlestick. Brett Butler punched a grounder to the right side, where Phillips made a terrific stop to his left, then had to lob an off-balance throw to the covering Eckersley, running at full speed.

There was no margin for error. Eckersley's foot beat Butler's by a step. That's where the team's celebration took place, just off first base, the scene of a completed masterpiece. Let it be well remembered.

Baseball after death, and destruction

Henry Schulman, Chronicle Staff Writer

There is no cheering in the press box, but there is weeping.

I try to keep my weeping to a minimum and reserve it for important stuff, like when the popcorn machine breaks or a writer with a fat head camps in the row in front of me.

Oct. 27, 1989, was different. Ten days had passed since the earthquake and the World Series was set to resume at Candlestick Park. More than 62,000 people had filled a much-despised ballpark that stood firm, like Gibraltar, when our world shook.

As part of a pregame ceremony to pay respects to those who died in the quake and honor the thousands of law-enforcement heroes, the cast of Beach Blanket Babylon led the entire stadium in a sing-along rendition of the song "San Francisco" ("San Francisco, open your Golden Gate"), the title track from a 1936 film about the 1906 quake.

That is when I lost it, at the very moment we had turned from marking death and destruction to celebrating life, the need to push forward and, yes, baseball.

There is a rhythm to a baseball game and a season. The arrhythmia created by Loma Prieta shook our national game in ways we could not have imagined at 5:03 p.m. on Oct. 17, 1989, a minute before the ground moved.

I was like Derek Jeter (only without the talent and boyish good looks), a near-rookie baseball writer who got to the World Series at the start of my career, covering the Giants for the Oakland Tribune and working with such luminaries as Monte Poole, Kit Stier and Dave Newhouse.

The Giants had been smoked in the first two games of the Series in Oakland, and the San Francisco fans were expecting a different outcome at the 'Stick, where, it seemed, the Giants could do no wrong that season.

The press box was full when the quake struck. I was poring over game notes when I felt the first rumble. Having grown up in Los Angeles and experiencing the 1971 Sylmar quake, I knew exactly what was happening. The press box became chaotic, full of out-of-state writers who knew what to do in hurricanes and tornadoes, but not earthquakes.

Nick Peters, then of the Sacramento Bee, now in the Baseball Hall of Fame, yelled, "Don't panic!" That seemed to help.

Everybody's in the dark

With the power out, we were in the same boat as the fans, unaware of how serious this earthquake was both inside and outside the stadium. You have to remember, this was before cell phones, smart phones and the Internet. The press box phones were out. Our best hope for communications would have been one of those parrots that flew from house to house distributing news on "The Flintstones."

Like the fans, many of us assumed power would be restored and the game would be played. Then came word from transistor radios (remember those?) that "the Bay Bridge had collapsed" and "the entire city was on fire," exaggerations both, but enough for us to realize we needed to go to the field to cover not a baseball game, but a stadium evacuation.

Players were in the dark. Many were frightened, as were their families. I saw A's catcher Terry Steinbach comfort his wife in an iconic scene that was captured by photos.

"A lot of us are just walking around in a daze," Mike Krukow told me on the field, "not knowing what to do, dazed and confused."

When the game was called, San Francisco police delivered the news to fans with a bullhorn from one of its cruisers. In another scene hard to forget, Giants manager Roger Craig quickly got into his pickup truck in full uniform, wanting to beat the crowd to the freeway, and rode off. We always assumed the Humm Baby came to work on a horse.

We got our quotes and grabbed our stuff from a press box that now was off-limits to reporters for fear of structural damage. Just outside the players' parking lot, I got into my Honda Accord. Newhouse took the passenger seat. Together, we typed our stories on our Radio Shack word processors. It was dark by then and I flipped on my headlights so other writers could sit in front of the car and see their screens, my engine running so the car battery would not die.

We filed by using one telephone left to us by a television crew. It took 5 to 10 minutes just to get a line. A fight nearly broke out when one Spanish-language radio reporter hogged the phone to do several live reports.

Only when we filed and left the desolate parking lot did we realize the scope of Loma Prieta. I had to drive Newhouse back to Oakland over the San Mateo Bridge. Traffic remained heavy and the radio news told of the devastation: one slab of Bay Bridge roadway collapsed, the Marina district in flames, Interstate 880 pancaked with what we figured were hundreds of bodies inside.

The big decision

As the region sifted through the damage, Commissioner Fay Vincent had to decide what to do with the World Series, which had been played to its conclusion every year since 1905. In one of the eeriest events I ever attended, Vincent conducted an Oct. 18 news conference in a candlelit ballroom at the St. Francis Hotel, which still had no electricity.

Vincent announced plans to resume the Series on Tuesday, Oct. 24, a week after the quake, enough time for the Bay Area to return to some normality.

It was a highly controversial decision. Some suggested moving the World Series outside the Bay Area. Others suggested canceling it. In a story I wrote for the Oct. 20 Oakland Tribune, Giants outfielder Pat Sheridan said, "All the tragedies of the earthquake have taken the glimmer out of the World Series. A lot of people, the season as long as it is, want to get home.

"There are still people buried under that freeway. To think five days is going to relieve all the pressure of what people are feeling about this, I think it's going to take longer than that."

Vincent agreed, somewhat. Three days later, he said it would not be appropriate to restart the Series while workers continued to remove the dead from the collapsed Cypress structure. He announced another postponement, to Friday, Oct. 27. But he was firm on one point: Baseball needed the World Series, and more important, disaster-struck Bay Area residents needed their World Series.

Daze, er, days off

During the 10-day hiatus, the A's worked out in Phoenix to escape the rain and the nonstop earthquake news. The Giants worked out at Candlestick, bored out of their wits awaiting Game 3.

We reporters dutifully jotted their thoughts and the results of their intrasquad games. At the same time, after working so hard on the story and being so single-mindedly focused on baseball, we had a chance to reflect on the bigger picture.

Those of us who love the Bay Area understand the Faustian bargain we made by choosing to live here. We celebrate its beauty and cultural diversity knowing full well the ground underneath is riddled with fissures that can - and will - cause so much destruction.

We accept it because it is home.

When Game 3 finally arrived, the A's continued what would be a four-game sweep of the Giants as if nothing happened. But something did happen, and on that late afternoon only the heartless could not shed a tear or two when the Giants asked for a moment of silence at 5:04 p.m. to remember the dead, then celebrated the living with a rousing chorus of "San Francisco."

Oakland A's MLN: AFL Gets Underway

Melissa Lockard
OaklandClubhouse.com

Oct 15, 2009

The Arizona Fall League is officially underway, with two games already in the books. We update the progress on the A's prospects playing in the league, as well as A's prospects participating in winter ball around the world.

Arizona Fall League

* Note: The Phoenix Desert Dogs have gone 1-1 in their first two games. All of the A's prospects participating in the fall league are on the Desert Dogs' roster.

Jemile Weeks: Weeks is off to a fast start for Phoenix. Batting lead-off, the A's 2008 first-round pick is three-for-his-first-

nine with two doubles, an RBI, a walk and a stolen base.

Corey Brown: The outfielder has collected two hits, both singles, in eight at-bats. He has walked once and struck-out three times.

Grant Desme: The A's "30-40 man" has one hit in seven at-bats, but he has walked three times. He also has five strike-outs.

Mickey Storey: Storey is the only A's pitcher to have appeared in a game thus far. He tossed one scoreless inning in the AFL opener, allowing a walk, but retiring the other three batters.

Mexico

Chris Carter: Carter is continuing to be an extra-base machine with the Guasave of the Mexican Winter League. Through three games, he has three hits - all of the extra-base variety. On Wednesday, he hit his second homer in three games. His other hit is a double. Carter also walked once on Wednesday, but he also struck-out, his eighth in three games.

Arnold Leon: After allowing a run in his first winter appearance for Culiacan, Leon rebounded with a scoreless inning on Wednesday. He allowed one hit and struck-out one. In 2.1 innings this winter, Leon has given up three hits and a run, but has walked none and struck-out two.

Corey Wimberly: Wimberly has been an everyday fixture in the Obregon line-up, appearing in all four games. He has four hits in 17 at-bats (.235 BA), but has driven-in three runs and scored four times. He has also stolen a base and walked once.

Venezuela

Chris Denorfia: Denorfia has collected at least one hit in all but one of the four games he has played for Zulia thus far. He is four-for-15 (.267) with two doubles and a homerun. He has also walked twice and scored twice.

Scott Patterson: The tall right-handed reliever has made two appearances thus far for Lara. In two innings, he has allowed only a hit and he has struck-out three.

Gregorio Petit: Petit has reached safely in four of five games for Caracas. He has five hits in 18 at-bats (.278) and has driven-in four. One of the hits is a double and he has also walked four times and stolen a base.

Raul Padron: Padron has seen time at catcher and as DH, appearing in all five games for Caracas. He is two-for-nine (.222) with a double and an RBI. He has yet to walk or strike-out.

Leonardo Gil: The infielder has made two late-game appearances for Caracas, striking out in his only plate appearance.

Kyle Middleton: After struggling in his first start for Aragua, Middleton put together a much better second outing, allowing only a run on two hits and two walks in 4.2 innings. He struck-out one. Middleton now has allowed five runs in 7.2 innings over two starts this winter.