

A's News Clips, Saturday, October 17, 2009

Giants, A's remember day that shook baseball

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Twenty years ago today, at 5:04 p.m., a half-hour before World Series Game 3 at Candlestick Park, Al Michaels told a national TV audience, "I think we're having an earth..."

The Giants and A's were rendered irrelevant after the Loma Prieta quake shook the region. Amid death and destruction, the Series was pushed back 10 days.

While the Giants resumed working out at the 'Stick, A's manager Tony La Russa took his team to Phoenix for two days to maintain a higher level of focus.

The A's completed a four-game sweep with just two starting pitchers, Dave Stewart and Mike Moore, and an imposing offense that outscored the Giants 32-14, matching the most one-sided World Series in history. The A's never trailed in a game, and no Giants starting pitcher lasted beyond four innings.

Here are stories from the A's and Giants, 20 years later:

When the quake hit

Terry Kennedy, Giants catcher: "We had just finished stretching and getting ready for introductions. I was in the dugout talking to Dusty (Baker, the hitting coach). I hear a lot of noise. I'm thinking people are stomping their feet. Dusty says, 'That's an earthquake.' I look down the tunnel (leading from the clubhouse to the dugout), and here comes Robby Thompson. There's seven steps to the dugout, and he jumps all seven. I look out on the field and see a big wave. I look up at the suites and see a guy who has his hands on the window and his feet on the sill, and it looked like he'd jump. He didn't, but there was pure panic on his face. Things were wiggling and shaking."

Tony Phillips, A's second baseman: "I just started warming up, going out to stretch, doing a sprint out on the field. When I was running, I fell off balance. It shook. I never felt an earthquake before. I thought it was the crowd roaring. When they roar, you can feel it. So my first thought was, 'Gosh, if it's going to be like this all night, I'm going to be in trouble.' "

La Russa: "When we won the first two games in Oakland, Roger Craig had said we'd all experience a big difference when we got to Candlestick. The fans were really into it. So I'm in the dugout, and when I hear the noise, I figured it was fans pounding their feet. I felt, 'Boy, this is going to be a noisy night.' Then I looked out and saw the light standards swaying."

Craig Lefferts, Giants pitcher: "In the clubhouse at Candlestick, there were no windows. When the electricity went out, it went completely black. The earthquake was so strong I almost fell. Then it was trying to figure out where you were."

Terry Steinbach, A's catcher: "Ron Hassey was catching. It was my day off, so I was out there early to take in the pregame ceremony. You heard it. We were right next to SFO. I thought a plane was coming over and looked up. Todd Burns was sitting next to me in the dugout, then it rolled. I'm higher than him. He's higher than me. I'm higher than him."

Mark Letendre, Giants trainer: "I was fitting Don Robinson with a knee brace to pitch. The clubhouse was virtually empty because of introductions coming up. Not many of us were in the athletic trainers' room, just me and Don. I carry a penlight to examine eyes if there's an injury on the field, and that's how we saw our way to the field."

Jorge Costa, Giants vice president of stadium operations: "I was captivated by how everything really seemed to slow down, and I just started looking around the park and saw a few things I'll never forget. The guy (Benjamin Young) who was untangling the wind sock on one of the tower lights. I obviously was concerned about him because I could see the light tower shifting back and forth. Then I saw people all over the park standing still like they were frozen, yet kind of moving slightly because of the shock waves from the earthquake. Then I saw the scoreboard had just kind of blacked out, and there were all these kind of symbols that you typically see when they're doing maintenance work on the scoreboard. There was the initial reaction of the crowd when they just went nuts, and I thought, 'That's San Francisco.' Then there was the guy with the sign that said, 'If you think that was something, wait till the Giants come to bat.' "

Steve Vucinich, A's clubhouse attendant: "When it hit, we thought it was the roar of the crowd, but we were so far from the stands. Then all this dust that had probably been there since they built the place came pouring out of the vents, and we ran out and saw the light standards rocking."

Hank Greenwald, Giants broadcaster: "What I remember most was the sight of guys like Tim McCarver and Jim Palmer running from the press box. Kuip (Duane Kuiper) and I looked at each other as if to say 'Where do they think they're going? Do they really think they're going to outrun an earthquake?' "

Wally Haas, A's owner: "Up there in the boxes, we felt like we were going to fall. Those boxes were added onto the stadium, and it was pretty darn scary."

Al Rosen, Giants general manager: "I was upstairs with guests, among them Bill Walsh and Shecky Greene, the comedian. I remember I was talking with Bill. He was talking baseball, and I was talking football. Once we realized we weren't going down crashing, we all but breathed a sigh of relief."

Bob Lurie, Giants owner: "I remember telling Al Michaels, who I've known forever, that I'm sure the game will be played. I was a little bit wrong."

The ensuing moments

Costa: "At some point, when the Bay Bridge thing came out and the fire information came in, the crowd changed. We started seeing pictures of the bridge. The one thing I remember about it was how calm everything was, how everybody was just doing their job, and people at some point when they saw the pictures and saw the information made a decision to leave. People say that was some evacuation. That was no evacuation. It was a dissipation."

Lefferts: "We got out of the clubhouse and congregated on the field. I was looking for my wife up in the stands. As we were all standing in the dugout area looking up, I remember hearing someone screaming that the Bay Bridge had collapsed. That was the first memory I had it was something really big."

Steinbach: "The families came down on the field. My wife wasn't fond of earthquakes. It was emotional. The biggest concern was, we had no way to get ahold of our 2-year-old daughter, who was in Alameda with a babysitter. The news reports came

in, and one can only imagine what else could be completely trashed. As it turned out, we had zero damage at the house. But we couldn't have known that."

Letendre: "My father, Bertrand, was in the crowd and had an angina attack. We figured he had a heart attack. He panicked and triggered a whole slew of things. He had a heart condition, got excited and forgot to take nitroglycerin. I had him climb over the railing, and I caught him and ran and got an ambulance. The mobile control center was coming in from center field to take care of 60,000-plus people, but we got my father transported out. He wasn't lacking for medical care. Twenty years later, he's retired and living in Florida and still talking about it."

Greenwald: "Fortunately, there were two local clubs in that Series. Ninety percent of those in the stands were from the Bay Area and knew what was happening. There was no panic among them. Ninety percent of those in the press box were from out of town, and that was the source of the greatest amount of panic."

Lon Simmons, A's broadcaster: "As I recall, we hadn't started our pregame show, but we were able to go on the air eventually and talk about what we could. It was funny. Bill King got out a phone book, and it had instructions on how to prepare for an earthquake. He was reading it. Have plenty of water, store batteries for flashlights. I finally said, 'Bill, it's a little too late for that.' "

Mickey Morabito, A's traveling secretary: "Nobody was going to shower. Very few guys changed. It was, 'Let's get on the bus and get out of here.' We took buses back to Oakland. We couldn't get on a bridge, so we went down to San Jose and around the bay. We got a police escort down 101 and then took 880 north to the Coliseum. We listened to reports on transistor radios. There was damage at the Oakland airport and broken windows at the Arena. As we're listening in the bus, it's almost deathly silence. Everybody's heading back to Oakland with uncertainty what it'll be like when we get there."

Stewart: "I lived in Emeryville and took that Cypress Structure every day. To get back, it was a four- to five-hour journey, and I had to go right past it. So on my way home, I stopped and could see the workers trying to get people out. I walked around, still in uniform pants and sleeves, then I went home, showered and came back with help, some of the local vendors. They opened up their stores and helped feed the workers and the displaced people there. It was sad being there. That's what it was, really, really sad."

The 10-day delay

Lefferts: "It was difficult because it was just such a traumatic event. For us as baseball players wanting to go out on the field, it kind of ruined that because it made baseball so unimportant. Then, as time went on and we were working out and close to getting back, we felt there was a purpose for us to provide the entertainment factor of baseball within the healing process of a big trauma."

Lurie: Commissioner "Fay Vincent at one point thought about maybe we should move the Series to San Diego, and I went ballistic after all our efforts to keep the franchise here."

Sandy Alderson, A's general manager: "The earthquake was a terrible event, obviously. Loss of life, injuries, property damage. At some point, it became apparent we'd resume play. In spite of everything that happened, we felt as an organization that the earthquake would be remembered for many years, and so would the result of the World Series. We owed to the city of Oakland and our fans to be prepared. The best way to do that was to go to Arizona and get some game

competition. I think we waited an appropriate amount of time. It wasn't an attempt to get out of the Bay Area and escape the aftermath of the earthquake, but to be prepared for the resumption of the World Series."

Haas: "We took some heat for leaving the area, but in 1988 (a World Series loss to the Dodgers), we felt we got rusty after sweeping Boston and then waiting. I think we wanted to focus on getting as game-ready as we could, and that would have been hard with everything going on in the Bay Area."

La Russa: "I had remembered reading Pat Riley's book. Before the playoffs, he'd take his team out of L.A. to spend time together and have good workouts, giving them the best shot for the playoffs. We had a forecast of rain. I went to Wally and Sandy about taking the club to Arizona, where we could get two days of workouts and be together one night at a restaurant."

Rosen: "I felt we did the right thing (staying in the Bay Area). Our players felt we did the right thing."

If no quake

Haas: "Bob Welch had strained his groin shagging flyballs, as only he could, by making a competition out of it, and it didn't look like he was going to be able to start (Game 3). He was a Giants killer, 18-1 or something against them as a Dodger, and we were feeling pretty good about his start, and it looked like Curt Young was going to have to go instead."

Young: "Bobby was scheduled to pitch, and he'd been announced as the starter, but Tony said be ready to go, you might be the one. Bobby was telling me he didn't want to start and screw it up because of his groin, get us behind. But even I didn't know if I'd pitch. Who knows? Bobby might have been OK and gone out and pitched seven innings."

Stewart: "What really needs to be clear is it wouldn't have mattered if there was an earthquake or not. We were going to beat the Giants. That, everyone knew. The earthquake took place, and any time you have a tragedy of that magnitude, it takes precedence over everything. But if you look at the baseball separately, nobody in the sport can say that the outcome would have turned out any differently. Maybe they win one game, but the outcome was still going to be that they got beat."

In retrospect

Costa: "Candlestick was 29 years old. The park itself was built on bedrock, and bedrock is going to react a lot differently than fill, so the people who were in the park and people in the parking lot had far different experiences, what they felt and might have even seen. It really did hold up really well. Most of the stuff that had to be treated and cured was cosmetic in nature and really limited to a few places. Ten days later, when we played the game, it felt really funky to me. I just couldn't get the earthquake out of my mind and wanting everything to be OK and everything to be safe. I just think about how fortunate we were."

Haas: "One thing not a lot of people know about was that if the Series had gone any longer -- no one had consulted the Coliseum, and Bill Graham and the Rolling Stones had the Coliseum for a whole week. Bill called me. He was my dear friend and said, 'We have a real problem. How dare you not consult me about this? You are going to win in four games, aren't you?' And he really meant it. So they had the Coliseum all set up for the Rolling Stones, but there were all these other negotiations going on, and at the end of the day, Major League Baseball would have had to write a pretty good check to Bill to get those dates."

Greenwald: "My only regret from all that happened that day was that Candlestick survived. I viewed it as the Giants' best chance to get a new ballpark. Alas, it took 11 more years."

Making the grade: Relief corps

Beat writer Mychael Urban assesses A's bullpen

By Mychael Urban / MLB.com

"Making the Grade" is a four-part series analyzing the performances of various units of the 2009 Oakland A's. It kicked off Wednesday with Starting Pitching. Today: Bullpen, followed by Offense (Wednesday) and Defense (Friday).

OAKLAND -- The A's expected their bullpen to be strong in 2009, and it was.

The final makeup of it, however, was considerably different than what they'd envisioned.

Brad Ziegler, coming off a record-setting rookie season, and Joey Devine were expected to share the closer's role, and veteran free-agent signee Russ Springer factored heavily into the plan.

Instead, Ziegler ended up in more of a setup role; Devine's season ended before it started when he underwent Tommy John ligament reconstruction surgery; and Springer was largely ineffective before being waived after the All-Star break.

Yet Oakland's bullpen, which featured for the second consecutive season one of the biggest Cinderella stories in the game, finished the year as one of the American League's best. And with every key member of it under club control for 2010, it is positioned to repeat as one of the league's more enviable units.

Overall: A-

Right-hander Andrew Bailey was a struggling starter at Double-A Midland in 2008 when the RockHounds' season hit the midway point, after which Bailey, who turned 25 this May, was moved into the bullpen. The rest is history, literally. Bailey killed the Texas League in the second half that season, but he still entered Spring Training with the A's as the longest of shots to make the big league team. He didn't just make the team; he eventually took over the closer's role, was the only rookie in either league to earn a trip to the All-Star Game in St. Louis, and set Oakland's rookie record with 26 saves (and a 1.84 ERA with a remarkable 0.88 WHIP). A leading candidate for AL Rookie of the Year honors, Bailey deserves an "A+."

Righty Michael Wuertz was an under-the-radar trade acquisition, but with a devastating slider than helped him ring up 102 strikeouts in a career-high 78 2/3 innings, he established himself one of the premier setup men in the game. His 2.63 ERA looks good on paper, but Wuertz, 30, is the type of pitcher you have to see on a regular basis to appreciate how good he really is. Were it not for a 5.93 ERA over 12 appearances in July -- the likely result of having been used almost daily for the first three months -- he'd probably get twice the raise he'll get over his 2009 salary of a reported \$1.1 million via arbitration this offseason. Anything less than an "A" would be insane.

Though he didn't arrive on the scene until September, lefty Brad Kilby deserves an "A," as well. He allowed one earned run in 11 appearances, with 20 punchouts over 17 innings and a 0.82 WHIP. His deceptive delivery, in which he hides the ball behind his back before unloading, is something the league is sure to examine and eventually adjust to, but his command and willingness to attack hitters suggests that Kilby, 26, will be able to counter-adjust and find a prominent role next season.

Craig Breslow was another low-profile addition, but he played a high-profile role as the bullpen's key lefty and posted a 3.36 ERA with an admirable 1.11 WHIP over 77 outings. A 29-year-old not yet eligible for arbitration, Breslow, 29, brought stability to an unstable situation -- the team's projected lefty specialists going into the season struggled -- and merits a strong "B."

Ziegler was a victim of his 2008 success in 2009. Having finished the previous year as Oakland's closer, he was touted as the co-closer with Devine when camp opened, but was ill and dinged up for much of the early season, eventually losing the job to Bailey. Ziegler is a quality big league pitcher, but he's not a closer. His sidearm delivery induces a ton of ground balls, which he got when he was on, but when he's off and leaving pitches up in the zone, he's susceptible to a string of hard-hit balls. His 3.07 ERA with a 1.50 WHIP in 69 games gets him a "B-."

Righty Jeff Gray bounced back and forth between the Minors and Majors, but he showed enough in his final callup to warrant high praise from scouts and opponents alike. Gray, 27, struggled at times, particularly in early callups, but he throws hard, has solid secondary stuff (1.29 WHIP) and has the kind of competitive fire and mound presence that should help him stave off another season on the I-80 shuttle.

The A's hoped that Jerry Blevins would make the most of his opportunity to seize the lefty-specialist role for which he was penciled in going into Spring Training, but he never quite caught on and spent much of the season at Triple-A Sacramento. His 4.84 ERA in 20 appearances with the big club leaves him with a "C-," but his 1.12 WHIP suggests that Blevins, 26, has a future with the A's -- or another club -- if he can adopt a more aggressive mindset, a la Kilby.

Righty Santiago Casilla entered the season at a crossroads. No longer a prospect, he needed to prove -- at the very least -- that he could handle the responsibility of a secondary setup role. He didn't, and for that he gets a "D." He posted a 5.96 ERA in 46 games, lost the trust of the coaching staff and now, at 29, his future with the team is uncertain at best.

Righty Edgar Gonzalez is not under club control, but as the team's designated long reliever and spot starter, he deserves the respect of a grade. But he doesn't deserve more than a "C." In 20 relief appearances, he posted a 5.21 ERA, and it's hard to imagine the A's having a burning desire to bring him back.

No Forgetting the Earthquake World Series

By Art Spander, For RealClearSports.com

SAN FRANCISCO — Twenty years ago, Oct. 17, 1989. 5:04 p.m. PDT, Athletics vs. Giants, Game 3 of the Bay Bridge World Series, a festive time that in an instant would become a tragic one.

"I didn't really feel the quake at first," Bob Welch said a while ago. He was in the visiting clubhouse, getting liniment rubbed on his shoulder. He was five minutes from walking to the bullpen to warm up, to prepare for his start.

"I thought they were rolling barrels on the ramps above the clubhouse."

On the other side, Dusty Baker, the Giants' batting coach at the time, didn't have any doubts. He knew it was an earthquake.

Up in the second deck at Candlestick Park, where the overflow media had been seated, an area of temporary desks, the so-called auxiliary press box, I also knew.

What no one knew was how severe it would be. How it would knock down freeways, dissect the World Series.

Twenty years ago. I still have the memories. I still have a copy of the column I wrote for the San Francisco Examiner a couple of days after the quake. Not the night of the quake, because there was no power in the city.

The Examiner and Chronicle, a joint-operating effort, couldn't print. The Oakland Tribune could. The San Jose Mercury could, but not the papers in the city where the tragedy occurred.

Rob Matwick is an exec with the Texas Rangers now. Twenty years ago he was public relations director for the Houston Astros, assigned as many of his colleagues to work the Series. He was adjacent to me when it sounded as if a fright train were running through the park.

"What's that?" he asked. As Dusty, I'm a native Californian. "An earthquake," I answered. I'd spent all my life in the state, south and north. I know earthquakes.

"But," I wrote 20 years ago, "I've never known one like this before. Candlestick swayed like a ship on a stormy sea. The quake lasted maybe 15 seconds that seemed like an hour.

"And then it was over, and some 60,000 cheered. They were Californians. They were Giants fans. They were survivors. Surely this was a sign from nature: No harm, no foul. 'Play ball, play ball,' they began to chant."

The teams couldn't play. No power. No lights. No idea of what was happening.

Norm Sherry, the Giants pitching coach, was telling those on the field, "The Bay Bridge is down." I had one of those little battery-powered TV sets. The bridge was standing, but a section of the upper deck had dropped onto the lower deck.

In effect, the bottom had dropped out of the World Series.

"After it stopped," said Welch, who now lives in Arizona, "I still thought I was going to pitch. Actually, I thought about (Oct. 1) 1987, when my last start for the Dodgers, there was a 5.9 quake in L.A. that rolled me out of bed."

This one, the Loma Prieta Quake, named for the fault some 65 miles southwest of San Francisco, was first called at 6.9 on the Richter scale, where the rating is logarithmic and not merely one step above the next.

Then it was revised to 7.1, the worst earthquake in Northern California since the infamous one of 1906, which along with a subsequent fire destroyed most of San Francisco.

There was a fire in the '89 quake too, centralized in the Marina District, and because of low pressure, water had to be pumped from the bay. A couple of days after the quake, Joe DiMaggio was in line with Marina residents to check on property owned by his family.

That first night was science-fiction eerie. All of San Francisco was pitch-black. No lights, no elevators, no television. The next afternoon, baseball commissioner Fay Vincent spoke to the media in a ballroom at the St. Francis Hotel lit only by candelabra, as in the 18th Century.

From Candlestick to candelabra in a matter of hours.

Dozens were killed by the quake, many under a collapsed freeway in Oakland, never to be rebuilt. Damage was in the billions.

Candlestick, windy, much-reviled Candlestick, built on a solid ground, held up except for broken hunks of cement here and there.

The A's, who had taken the first two games in Oakland, decided to dress at their park and bus across the bay, maybe 23 miles from stadium to stadium. Wives and families had come in their own transportation.

Mark McGwire helped his then-girlfriend from the stands. As the A's Stan Javier, years later to play for the Giants, helped his wife, Vera. Oakland's Terry Steinbach embraced his wife, Mary. The Giants' Kelly Downs, in a photo that would be on the cover of Sports Illustrated, carried a young relative to safety.

Jose Canseco would be seen gassing up his Porsche some place down the Peninsula from Candlestick. Who knew if the San Mateo Bridge, the next one south of the Bay Bridge were open — it wasn't at first — or even the Dumbarton Bridge?

Some wanted the World Series stopped right there. Vincent, alluding to Winston Churchill insisting the cinemas in London be kept open during blitz to create a sense of normalcy, intended to continue.

Ten days after the quake, with a group of rescue workers, police and firemen tossing out ceremonial first pitches, baseball was back. But not for long. The A's won two more and swept the Series.

Twenty years ago, a time of joy and grief.