

A's News Clips, Sunday, October 18, 2009

A's Simmons making up for lost time

Follows Strasburg's debut with three shutout innings

By Daren Smith / MLB.com

James Simmons had a tough act to follow.

Taking the mound a day after Stephen Strasburg made his Arizona Fall League debut, Simmons tossed three shutout innings Saturday as the Phoenix Desert Dogs handed the Surprise Rafters their first loss, 11-2.

Simmons (1-0) began his second AFL stint by allowing two singles and two walks while striking out three.

"I hadn't thrown to hitters in a real game since the end of August. Being back on the mound, it felt great," the Athletics prospect said. "I had some success today, so it's definitely a confidence-booster."

Selected by Oakland with the 26th overall pick in the 2006 Draft, Simmons went 7-7 with a 5.72 ERA in 23 games at Triple-A Sacramento. He pitched in the 2007 Rising Stars Showcase and is back in the AFL after spending three weeks in August on the disabled list with a strained right deltoid muscle.

"I missed three or four starts. I didn't get the amount of innings the organization would like to see me get," Simmons said. "I'd strung together quite a few good starts. The last thing you want to do is get injured when you're throwing well. I knew we had a shot at the playoffs, so it was hard for me to go through that."

Simmons also is trying to develop an "out pitch."

"It seems like I can get two strikes on everybody," the 23-year-old right-hander said. "I'm working on a cutter and throwing the curveball a little harder. The last two years, it's been a little loopy."

Josh Wilkie (Nationals) worked two innings and Hiroshi Katayama, Heath Rollins (Rays) and Jeff Mandel (Nats) kept the shutout intact until the ninth, when Surprise (4-1) scored twice against A's farmhand Sam Demel.

Former first-rounder Brandon Snyder (Orioles) gave Phoenix (4-1) a quick lead with an RBI single in the first. A two-run homer by Blue Jays prospect A.J. Jimenez highlighted the Desert Dogs' five-run fifth and Snyder had another RBI single in a five-run ninth.

Cardinals Minor Leaguer Mike Parisi (0-1) got the loss, despite yielding a run on four hits in four innings.

Jeff Bianchi, Kansas City's second-round pick in the 2005 Draft, went 3-for-4 with an RBI for the Rafters.

When the '89 Series left us all a little shaken

By Dan Shaughnessy, Boston Globe, October 18, 2009

It was 20 years ago yesterday.

The first pitch of the third game of the World Series was less than a half-hour away when the earth moved. For 15 seconds.

I was in the upper deck of Candlestick Park in the "auxiliary press area," sitting alongside Globe photographer Stan Grossfeld, typing an early column on Giants slugger Matt Williams moving to shortstop for Game 3.

Suddenly, it felt like we were on a boat. Concrete swayed. Fans screamed. Light towers wobbled like sunflowers in a summer wind.

"Earthquake!" Stan said as he started taking pictures. He knew. He'd lived through aftershock events in Mexico City and Tokyo.

Northern California's 6.9 Loma Prieta earthquake killed 63 people, collapsed a portion of I-880 in Oakland, took out a piece of the Bay Bridge, ignited more than two dozen fires, left 12,000 people homeless, and ultimately postponed the World Series for 10 days.

But we had no idea in the first moments after the upper deck stopped moving at 5:04 p.m.

Fans cheered when the quake ceased, and for a second it seemed like we might be in for just a momentary delay. Then we noticed that there was no power. Then a police car drove onto the diamond. Then fans in our seating area, folks with transistor radios, reported that the Bay Bridge had collapsed.

There wasn't going to be any baseball. Not that night. Not for a lot of nights.

It had been an awful year for the national pastime. Pete Rose had been banished from the game for gambling infractions. Commissioner Bart Giamatti died on Martha's Vineyard only five months after he was hired. And the World Series was halted by an act of God.

Interim commissioner Fay Vincent was a portrait of dignity in the hours and days after the quake. He sent all of us home from the Stick on the night of the 17th, then held a candlelight news conference at the St. Francis Hotel in Union Square the next day, announcing, "It's a great tragedy and it coincides with our modest little event . . . We know our place and our place is to wait."

So we waited. And we worked. We talked to ballplayers and their families. Oakland starter Bob Welch told us he had been in the trainer's room in the visitors' clubhouse when the earth shook. Welch and his wife left the park and drove home to their Marina-area apartment, where their 10-week-old son was with a nervous babysitter.

Oakland slugger Jose Canseco left the ballpark in full uniform and stopped to put gas in his sports car at a station near Candlestick.

"I was combing my hair in the clubhouse bathroom when it happened," said A's closer Dennis Eckersley. "I got out of there."

Traditionally, there is a postgame hospitality for media and "baseball family" members at the stadium site after World Series games. After filing my story (there were a few working telephones), I found the party (candle power and auxiliary lighting) and raised a few cups of beer with ancient baseball executive Bill Rigney.

"My parents lived through the big one out here in 1906," said Rigney. "This is the biggest one since. My mother always used to tell me that days like this meant hurricane weather. Hot, calm, October days. She's get her rosary beads out."

With the Bay Bridge partially collapsed, there was no getting back to my hotel in Berkeley that night. I wheeled onto the 101, bound for downtown San Francisco, but it was hard to find the city because there was no well-lit skyline. Just darkness, broken glass, and police presence to discourage looters. I found shelter at the Fisherman's Wharf Marriott, where patrons gathered to watch quake news on the generator-powered big-screen in the lobby. There was no food service, but it was apparent that a lot of mini-bars had been emptied by the guests.

Two days after the quake, I went back to Candlestick, where the Giants were working out. I returned to the upper deck to look for a jacket I'd left behind in the chaos. It was eerie. Rod Serling stuff. Except for the absence of fans, everything looked exactly as it had been when the earth moved. There were half-full cups of beer, Styrofoam coffee cups smeared with lipstick, and game programs with names filled in. It was a moment frozen in time, like the clock tower in "Back to the Future."

Minus electric power, many of us wrote stories long-hand and dictated the copy back to the office. Old school? More like middle school.

While I wrote stories, Stan took photographs. He went to Oakland and shot the pancaked Cypress Structure (I-880). He went to the Marina - where fires raged - and saw a scruffy Joe DiMaggio patiently waiting in line to go back to his home.

One of Stan's earthquake photos made it to the cover of the Sacramento Bee. It was a shot of a concerned dad, wearing a Giants cap, holding his young daughter while the quake rocked the upper deck at the Stick.

Weeks after we returned to Boston, the guy in the photo contacted Stan. Turns out the Page One picture had gotten him in trouble. He'd called in sick that day, only to have his boss see him on the front page of the local rag.

Twenty years ago. Last night.

