

A's News Clips, Tuesday, April 6, 2010

A's doomed by errors in opening-night loss to Mariners

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Ben Sheets said during the spring that the A's would have to take care of business as a team to be successful in 2010.

And while the A's new ace hardly was sharp in his Oakland debut Monday night, there was lots of blame to share in a 5-3 loss to the Seattle Mariners before an opening night crowd of 30,686.

The A's committed four errors that led to three unearned runs and grounded into four double plays in the opener of a four-game series.

They didn't advance a runner as far as second base against Felix Hernandez until the sixth inning but rallied from a 3-1 deficit to tie the game in the seventh.

Seattle broke through for the go-ahead runs in the top of the ninth, but they got help in doing so.

A's third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff threw wildly to first on a routine grounder that should have ended the inning. With the bases loaded, Casey Kotchman served a two-run single into left off Andrew Bailey to break a 3-3 tie.

Kotchman finished with four RBI.

Kouzmanoff, who made just three errors all of last season with San Diego, had a forgettable night as he also grounded into two double plays.

Catcher Kurt Suzuki had two throwing errors as Seattle ran early and often on Sheets.

"That's three errors there from two guys who won't make a lot," A's manager Bob Geren said.

Sheets' five-inning effort resembled his work through most of spring training as he struggled with his command.

He walked four with three strikeouts, leaving with the A's trailing 3-0.

After missing all of last season because of elbow surgery, Sheets has said he expects to spend the first half of the season shaking off rust.

He labored through 94 pitches in his first regular-season outing since Sept. 27, 2008.

"I thought I got better as the night went," Sheets said. "It just took me entirely too many pitches to get through five innings. ... Everything works off the fastball, so if you've got the fastball in a groove, everything else is going to be better."

Seattle attacked the A's in the same fashion that Oakland hopes to operate this season — by creating mischief on the bases.

Chone Figgins stole two bases and scored twice in the first three innings. Suzuki's throw skipped past shortstop Cliff Pennington on the first steal, allowing Figgins to reach third.

The scenario repeated itself in the third inning, when Suzuki sailed a throw into center trying to get Figgins.

Seattle also got a solo homer from Rob Johnson in the second when Sheets left a 3-1 fastball over the plate.

The A's broke through against Hernandez in the sixth when Ryan Sweeney's single up the middle scored Rajai Davis.

Hernandez left in the seventh after issuing consecutive two-out walks, and Pennington drilled an RBI single off Sean White that brought the A's to within 3-2.

With runners on first and second, Davis lined an RBI single to left. But Pennington, seeing left fielder Milton Bradley bobble the ball, tried advancing from first to third and was easily thrown out.

Travis Buck already had crossed the plate with the tying run, but the A's missed a chance to keep the rally going.

Pennington said he should have realized Buck would score once Bradley bobbled the ball, and stayed at second.

"That probably cost us the ballgame," Pennington said.

TODAY: Mariners (Ian Snell 7-10 in 2009) at A's (Dallas Braden 8-9), 7:05 p.m. TV: CSNCA. Radio: 860-AM; 1640-AM

A's update: Eric Chavez uncertain about role but says he can help club as a full-time DH

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 4/6/2010

Chavez uncertain about his role before opener

Eric Chavez had a throng of reporters waiting for him before Monday's game against the Seattle Mariners.

Not that he had much knowledge to drop on them.

Asked about being the A's regular designated hitter, Chavez said he still hadn't gotten word from the team about his role in light of Jack Cust being designated for assignment Saturday.

But he did say that being a DH is how he can best help the A's. "There's no doubt that just having to DH, I can play more games," he said. "Having not to throw a baseball gives me the best opportunity to be productive. It's up to me whether that happens or not."

Chavez was in the DH spot Monday, batting sixth, and A's manager Bob Geren and GM Billy Beane both indicated Saturday that Chavez would fill Cust's shoes as the everyday designated hitter.

This after Chavez spent the entire spring learning first base and preparing for a utility role, the thought being that playing part-time could preserve his health.

Geren told reporters before batting practice Monday that he eventually would talk with Chavez about his role.

Chavez — the team's longest-tenured and highest-paid player — said he didn't have a problem with his up-in-the-air status.

"I have a job, I'm employed. I have a uniform," he said. "I said from Day 1, I'll do whatever they want me to do."

The team hasn't announced any time frame for Coco Crisp to return. But the center fielder said he expects to miss anywhere from three to eight weeks with a fractured left pinkie. Crisp was expected to jump-start the offense as the leadoff man. Rajai Davis filled the role Monday and played center.

Right-hander Trevor Cahill, placed on the 15-day DL with a stress reaction in his left shoulder, said the injury was a minor problem last season but grew worse late in spring training this year.

Cahill was hit hard in two innings Saturday against the Giants, losing out on the fifth starter's job to Gio Gonzalez.

"Before it was just a nuisance," Cahill said. "But in my last start I was changing my mechanics to try to battle through it, and (the coaches) don't want that."

Postgame wrapup from A's 5-3 loss to Mariners

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/5/2010

A few thoughts on the A's season-opening defeat against Seattle, beyond the obvious point that four errors normally doesn't equate to victory ...

—Ben Sheets looked similar to me as he did in spring training with shaky command, and I'm not surprised by that considering he missed all of 2009. If Sheets stays healthy, I expect him to be much better in June and July than he is right

now. He's a fastball-curve ball guy, and he said the key is finding the location on his fastball. "Everything works off the fastball, so if you get the fastball in a groove, everything else is going to be better," Sheets said.

Are you confident Sheets will get sharper with time? Feel free to sound off ...

—Things may have turned out differently had Cliff Pennington not been thrown out at third in the seventh, on the Rajai Davis single that tied the game. That was a tough spot for Pennington. He was on first and when he got to second, he saw left fielder Milton Bradley bobble the ball and broke for third. Bob Geren gave him credit for holding up between second and third, to make sure Travis Buck scored before Pennington was tagged out. But I thought Pennington sort of ran into the tag, and Pennington, to his credit, accepted responsibility for the play afterward when addressing reporters.

But we'll probably see lots of Athletics getting thrown out on the bases this season, as the team is stressing aggressive baserunning. And for the most part, I don't think Geren will chew guys out for being aggressive and getting nailed.

—Speaking of baserunning, Ichiro Suzuki and Chone Figgins did exactly what the A's hope to get from their speed guys this season. They put pressure on the A's once they got on base and made things happen w/the running game. I didn't get a chance to talk to A's catcher Kurt Suzuki after the game, but I'd be interested to get his take on the Mariners' base-stealers.

And you should watch Tuesday how lefty Dallas Braden, who has a good pickoff move, handles Ichiro and Figgins in game 2 of this series ...

Pregame update for A's-Mariners season opener

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 4/5/2010

*****Updated w/Mariners' lineup:

Ichiro RF
Figgins 2B
Kotchman 1B
Bradley LF
Griffey Jr. DH
Lopez 3B
Gutierrez CF
Johnson C
Wilson SS

Hernandez RHP

All was very quiet in the A's clubhouse leading up to batting practice. If the intensity gets cranked up because it's Opening Night, that won't happen until closer to first pitch, I suppose. Tonight's batting order was about how I thought it would look — very similar to Saturday's, with Travis Buck swapped in at the No. 8 spot for Jack Cust. Here ya go ...

Davis CF
Barton 1B
Sweeney RF
Kouzmanoff 3B
Suzuki C
Chavez DH
Ellis 2B
Buck LF
Pennington SS

Sheets RHP

—Seattle's lineup hasn't been posted yet in the press box, so I'll tack it on to this post when I see it ...

A's need to generate more buzz

By Mark Purdy, San Jose Mercury News columnist

The Athletics' goal this season can be stated in four words or less:

Cut through the clutter.

Monday night was your basic perfect example.

In other fine North American metropolitan areas, baseball's first game of the year is an unofficial holiday. In Cincinnati, citizens even stage a parade to mark the occasion. In Washington, D.C., the president throws out the first pitch. In New York, fans compete to throw out the first obscenity.

Here? The A's opener at the Coliseum was just a mildly diverting activity at the Hegenberger Road exit on the Nimitz Freeway. The announced attendance of 30,686 was more than 4,000 below capacity. By the right field foul pole, entire rows were unoccupied.

Moreover, the buzz was nonexistent. You imagined a bunch of drivers passing by on the Nimitz Freeway and asking themselves: "The lights are on? What's happening? Are the Raiders grilling JaMarcus Russell about his playbook under heat lamps?"

Despite all of this, the contest unfolded in a quite entertaining fashion, with the A's losing a 5-3 decision to the Seattle Mariners. Ben Sheets, the Athletics' new \$10 million starting pitcher, gave up three runs in his first three innings. But his scrappy teammates managed to tie the score at 3-3 with a rally in the seventh.

As the springtime unfolds, more scrappiness would be more than welcome. In fact, if the A's are going to distinguish themselves from all the other sporting options in the Bay Area — or from all the other options on Bay Area sports television — then they had better be the scrappiest group west of Butler's basketball team.

Which, coincidentally, was also part of Monday's non-buzzy terrain. The A's somehow scheduled their opener opposite the NCAA basketball championship game (no surprise, then, that when the crowd was asked to vote by applause for either a scoreboard highlight of another baseball game or the hoops game, noisily chose basketball).

Not only that, but in terms of the day's broadcast activity, the A's were also competing with Tiger Woods' news conference, the Giants' opening telecast from Houston, and "Dancing With The Stars."

Now, there's no law that says the A's can't rise above all that and put on the most compelling sports show in the universe. But they're going to have to be far more interesting than they've been the past three seasons, when they finished a combined 64 1/2 games out of first place in the American League West.

Trust us. The A's new ballpark attraction, Live Dot Racing, won't be drawing throngs by itself. Generally, good baseball does better.

Thus: You know those back-to-back hits in the seventh inning by A's shortstop Cliff Pennington and outfielder Rajai Davis? The ones that drove in the tying runs? More of that would be swell. And the nice throw by A's catcher Kurt Suzuki, the one that pegged out famed Seattle base runner Ichiro Suzuki when he attempted to steal third base in the third inning? More of that would be helpful as well.

Stability might be an added bonus. Fans like to get familiar with players. Monday's left fielder was Travis Buck, who became the 11th consecutive different opening night starter at that position. Only four members of Monday's starting lineup for the A's were in last year's opening night batting order.

So perhaps that could be an unofficial mission, too. The A's might try to finish the season with as many of the same players as possible instead of trading some away at the trade deadline.

It's not complicated, really. Even if Major League Baseball allows A's owner Lew Wolff to pursue San Jose as a new home, his team will be playing in Oakland for at least few more years. It's never fun to attend a game where the empty seats outnumber the people in the hot dog lines. So could the rest of the year match some of the excitement that filled the Coliseum as the game went into the ninth inning with the score still tied?

Let's express our wish about that in three words or less:

Please. Please? Please.

A's make four errors in 5-3 loss to Mariners

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Monday afternoon, before the A's season opener, manager Bob Geren noted that because his team will have to scratch for every run, the A's will have to be as mistake-free as possible.

Instead, Oakland made four errors and a baserunning blunder Monday, including one by new third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff that led to Seattle's winning runs. With two outs and two on and the game tied 3-3 in the ninth, Andrew Bailey got Chone Figgins to hit a grounder to third, and Kouzmanoff, who made just three errors all of last season, uncorked a high throw to first and Daric Barton couldn't quite tag Figgins. With a full count, Casey Kotchman then dinked a single into center, sending in two men for a 5-3 Seattle victory. Kotchman drove in four runs, and the A's dropped their sixth opener in a row, the longest such streak in franchise history.

"That's a tough loss," Bailey said. "That game is how the whole season is going to be - back and forth."

Shortstop Cliff Pennington, who had two of the A's five hits, blamed the loss on a baserunning mistake he made in the seventh on Rajai Davis' single to left. Travis Buck was the lead runner and Pennington charged around second, trying to draw a throw to ensure that Buck scored. When Milton Bradley bobbed the ball, Pennington was hung up between second and third; he delayed things long enough to allow Buck to score the tying run, but Pennington said he should have stopped when he saw Bradley's bobble.

"I needed to shut it down," he said. "That probably cost us the ballgame."

While Oakland's offense was as non-threatening as anticipated, the A's still managed to come back against one of the top pitchers in the league. They didn't hit the ball out of the infield in the first five innings against Felix Hernandez, but used a bunch of walks and a smattering of singles to even things up, scoring once in the sixth and twice in the seventh.

The A's, last in the league in homers last year, designated their top home-run hitter of the past three years, Jack Cust, for assignment on Saturday. New designated hitter Eric Chavez went 0-for-4 with a strikeout.

The A's used speed to get their first run when, with one out in the sixth, Davis stole second and then went to third on a wild pitch by Hernandez. After Barton walked, Ryan Sweeney bounced a single up the middle to score Davis.

Ben Sheets, Oakland's top acquisition this winter, worked five innings and allowed four hits and four walks while striking out three; only two of the three runs he gave up were earned, one on a homer by Rob Johnson. It was Sheets' first appearance in a major-league game since Sept. 27, 2008; he missed last year after elbow surgery.

"I walked too many guys," he said. "I threw too many pitches."

It's uncertain when Cahill can return

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Yes, it does sound odd that **Trevor Cahill** is on the disabled list with a sore left shoulder (technically a stress reaction in the shoulder blade area) when he's a right-handed pitcher, but the problem is real.

According to Cahill, the discomfort first cropped up late last season, after he worked 1782/3 innings, the most in his pro career and the highest total on the team. He started more games (32) than any other major-league rookie last year.

By his final outing in Arizona this spring, against minor-leaguers, he could barely lift his arm. He got an MRI last week, and that's when he learned that he has a stress reaction, a bone injury that is typically the result of a repetitive motion such as a pitcher's delivery. Though Cahill tried altering his mechanics, he didn't want to change too much and wind up ineffective, or hurt something else.

Cahill won't throw for at least a week, he said, but he'll do all his normal strength work for his right arm. He has no idea how long he'll be out, and it's not as if this is something the A's have seen often.

"I tried to pitch through it," Cahill said, "and it wasn't working."

Briefly: Daric Barton, who walked three times, was part of a strange double play in the first; with no clear out calls, manager **Bob Geren** thought both Barton and **Ryan Sweeney** were safe, but he was told Barton had been tagged en route to second and Sweeney was out on a close play at first. "I thought we had runners at first and second," Geren said. ... Monday's game drew 30,680, well short of a sellout (35,067). ... **Michael Wuertz** (rotator cuff tendinitis) threw long toss again; there is no timetable for him to return to the mound, but it shouldn't be too long now that he's throwing daily again. ... **Tyson Ross**, the A's lone rookie, is the first player in Oakland history to wear No. 66. Equipment manager **Steve Vucinich** said that Ross is keeping the number he was assigned during the spring because he's 6-foot-6.

A'S LEADING OFF

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle, Tuesday, April 6, 2010

Lots in left: Travis Buck is the A's 11th different Opening Day left fielder in a row; he was also there in 2008. Last year, it was Matt Holliday. Ben Sheets is Oakland's fifth different Opening Day starter in a row.

Not too exciting, but not too bad

Ray Ratto, Chronicle Staff Writer

For a good five innings and change Monday night, the Athletics' season opener had that faint whiff of formaldehyde to it. The crowd of 30,686 was 13 percent short of a sellout; the San Jose thing sat, as it will all season, like a bad bratwurst; the pregame fireworks were sub-modest; the bunting was sparsely distributed; the disabled list was richly stocked; and, to cap it all, the A's hadn't hit a ball out of the infield.

Ben Sheets, the Opening Night starter, must have wondered to himself whether, given the kind of offensive and defensive support he received in his debut, he might have better off playing on last year's team, the Rest And Rehabilitation All-Stars.

But he stuck around, and so did the 30K, and found out that the A's as a baseball team may be harder to dismiss than their decidedly Amish view of ceremony might lead one to believe.

Not that Monday was a triumph - quite far from it. The A's earned their 5-3 defeat at the hands of the Seattle Mariners, their sixth consecutive home opener loss, because they didn't hit a ball out of the infield for the first five innings, committed four errors (two by catcher Kurt Suzuki trying to throw out Chone Figgins stealing), and in general demonstrated that their margins are too thin for the high level of mistakes they offered the customers.

In fact, the A's showed the full depth and breadth of both their strengths and weaknesses Monday, getting base runners at the very top (Rajai Davis and Daric Barton) and bottom (Cliff Pennington) of the order and nothing in the capacious middle (1-for-20 with four walks from Ryan Sweeney, Kevin Kouzmanoff, Suzuki, new designated hitter Eric Chavez, Mark Ellis and Travis Buck).

Then, after the torpor of the first five innings, they showed what they can do when they actually coax walks and put bat to ball. The crowd very nearly roared their approval, and doubtless would have had they gotten over the top.

Instead, the loudest reaction the entire night was the crowd booing as one when the Duke-Butler final came in. The crowd also booed Seattle's Milton Bradley, but given the service Bradley gave the A's in their last playoff year, one would have thought he merited better. And they even booed a bit when manager Bob Geren didn't get thrown out of the game in the bottom of the first after Barton was apparently called out for leaving the base line. I mean, what better time to get run and win the love of the public than to get run in the first of the year's 1,458 (non-extra) innings?

But they did wrap their arms around Chavez and Sheets, who had played either little or not at all last season - Chavez, largely for nostalgic reasons, and Sheets because he is the decorative yet functional base upon which the rest of the starting staff rests.

Chavez, who is still waiting for Geren to tell him he is the No. 1 DH even though he already knows, having seen Jack Cust designated for assignment Saturday, will be a popular figure because he is the oldest surviving Athletic, a rolling hospital bed who is trying to coax as many at-bats from his tetchy back as he can manage.

And Sheets, whom cynics might dismiss as this year's designated trade bait, learned that his comeback from couch duty will not be an easy one. He scuffled a bit in his first outing, giving up four hits, four walks, three runs and being victimized by the two throwing errors by Suzuki. But more than that, he saw his team hit as many balls out of the infield as he did a year ago. The A's looked, well, just as dead as dead can be. Not even Butler could save them.

But Sheets battled through the traffic around him, keeping the A's close enough to make their one earnest stab at Seattle starter Felix Hernandez. Not enough to finish the job mind you, but better than the way they originally seemed headed - by being feeble out-makers and unsightly defenders.

And eventually, they will even entertain by winning. We're counting on it.

Fans love the A's - if they stay in Oakland

Justin Berton, Chronicle Staff Writer

Oakland Athletics fan Bobby Tselentis showed up for Opening Night at the Coliseum eight hours before the first pitch Monday to cheer for his beloved A's and then, later that night, lead a protest against the team's owners.

Tselentis, 24, is a well-known character among A's die-hards. He sits with the drum-pounding crazies in the left-field bleachers and wears a green and gold hockey mask for nine innings.

But after attending nearly every home game for 10 years, and now being forced to watch the ownership, led by Lew Wolff, flirt with the cities of San Jose and Fremont, the Oakland native has found his fandom's edge.

"I couldn't be passionate about a team that's not from my hometown," Tselentis said while tailgating with about 150 A's enthusiasts known as The Fan-ily near the D Gate entrance. He looked around at his friends, covered in A's colors and bellowing "Let's go Oakland!" chants. "They're not going to find this passion in San Jose," he said.

"They're not gonna move," said Dana Morgan of Pinole, a Fan-ily member who said she has attended 22 straight opening day games.

Morgan had the optimism of many of the fans who showed up to see the A's play the Seattle Mariners on a chilly night and enjoy pre-game celebrations that included pyrotechnics, a salute to former A's shortstop Bert "Campy" Campaneris and the presentation of the Rookie of the Year Award to pitcher Andrew Bailey.

"All that stuff," Morgan said of the possible move, "doesn't matter to me. It's what happens on the field. It's the team ... I don't think they'd want to leave us."

Tselentis and friend Jorge Leon 24, weren't so sure, so they planned a march to begin during the seventh inning behind centerfield. The two made banners that read, "Lew Wolff Hates Oakland" and "A's Fans Say: No Way to San Jose," and they intended to circle the Coliseum, picking up supporters as they walked. It was unclear how many fans could join them. At game time, the A's had no official attendance count, but the empty sections and spotty rows suggested the team was still having trouble selling tickets.

"I want this team to continue to be a tradition in my family," said Leon, an Oakland resident. "I think other people will feel that way to, and they'll join us."

Tselentis said he watched with some jealousy Sunday night as the opening day game at Fenway Park in Boston included a performance by Aerosmith and Neil Diamond, whose "Sweet Caroline" has become the ballpark's unofficial anthem.

"I hate to have that kind of respect for Boston," Tselentis said, "but that city knows how to love its team."

Nick Morrow, 25, of Hayward showed up while the Fan-ily was tailgating before the game wearing a "Fremont Athletics" jersey. Morrow is friends with the group, but he favors a new stadium somewhere in the Bay Area for the modern amenities

The Fan-ily booed Morrow until he covered his shirt with a green T-shirt.

"I think all these people are going to follow if the A's if they move," he said. "They're certainly not going to become Giants fans overnight."

Opening Night is here

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at the Coliseum 5:32PM

It's Ben Sheets vs. Felix Hernandez here in Oakland, and it's bright sunlight despite this morning's rain; it sounds as if there are plenty of tickets left. Dress warm if you are heading this way.

Here's the lineup to kick off the A's 2010 season:

Davis CF, Barton 1B, Sweeney RF, Kouzmanoff 3B, Suzuki C, Chavez DH, Ellis 2B, Buck LF, Pennington SS

Little news here because the main event is more than an hour away. Eric Chavez said before batting practice that no one with the team has mentioned to him yet that he's the fulltime DH, but manager Bob Geren said Chavez will be briefed sometime. So that all continues to be a little strange - hey, that plan we had all spring and that was so carefully considered and mapped out? It's totally changed. Figure it out for yourself or read about it somewhere!

Michael Wuertz (rotator cuff tendinitis) feels great after throwing yesterday and he threw again today. There isn't a target date for him to get back on the mound, but at this rate, it won't be too far off.

Robert Buan confirms that his contract was terminated with 860AM; no postgame reporting from Buan, which is a shame given his length of service with the team and his excellent relationships with A's players past and present. He remains an A's employee and he is still helping with the game broadcasts.

All-time defense

The men who have defined brilliant glove work on each side of the bay

Bruce Jenkins, San Francisco Chronicle, 4/5/2010

A's

1B Mark McGwire: Hard work saw him improve each year; won the Gold Glove in 1990.

2B Dick Green: Solid and spectacular, merited consideration for World Series MVP (early-'70s) on his defense alone.

SS Campy Campaneris: Anchored three straight World Series champions with his range, arm and reliability.

3B Eric Chavez: Won six straight Gold Gloves (2001-06) before injuries shut him down.

C Ray Fosse: Short stay in Oakland (1973-75), but rates an edge over Terry Steinbach for pure fundamentals. Won two Gold Gloves in Cleveland.

LF Joe Rudi: Three straight Gold Gloves (1974-76), superb in the clutch, an all-time defensive great at this position.

CF Dwayne Murphy: Wise and athletic ballhawk won six consecutive Gold Gloves (1980-85).

RF Tony Armas: Best known for rocket arm, but had the complete package.

P Mike Norris: Two-time Gold Glove winner ranks with the best-ever pitchers defensively.

Worth mentioning: 1B Mike Hegan; 2B Mike Gallego and Mark Ellis; SS Alfredo Griffin, Walt Weiss, Mike Bordick and Miguel Tejada; 3B Sal Bando; LF Rickey Henderson; CF Dave Henderson and Rick Monday; C Dave Duncan and Steinbach; P Vida Blue and Kenny Rogers.

Giants

1B J.T. Snow: Young first basemen can only dream of being this good; won four of his six straight Gold Gloves with the Giants (1997-2000).

2B Robby Thompson: Extremely reliable, won the Gold Glove in '93.

SS Omar Vizquel: Ranks with Ozzie Smith at the top of the defensive list; won two of his 11 Gold Gloves in San Francisco (2005-06).

3B Jim Davenport: Tough call over Matt Williams, but Davenport (1958-70) was that good.

C Tom Haller: Worked well with everyone from Juan Marichal to Gaylord Perry, and has an edge in longevity.

LF Barry Bonds: In his prime, overcame an average arm to play the position as well as anyone; five Gold Gloves.

CF Willie Mays: The 12 straight Gold Gloves (1957-68) don't begin to explain his ability, instincts or style.

RF Bobby Bonds: A revelation when he joined the club; won Gold Gloves in 1971, '73 and '74.

P Jim Barr: Professor emeritus on the art of pitching, right down to the glove.

Worth mentioning: 2B Hal Lanier and Tito Fuentes; SS Jose Uribe and Johnnie LeMaster; 3B Williams and Bill Mueller; C Marc Hill, Kirt Manwaring, Benito Santiago and Mike Matheny; CF Garry Maddox and Darren Lewis; RF Felipe Alou, Jose Cruz Jr. and Randy Winn, P Jack Sanford, Rick Reuschel and Livan Hernandez.

Shaky defense costs A's in opener

Sheets allows three runs in five innings against Mariners

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Oakland came out of the gates walking -- seven times to be exact.

However, Seattle came out running.

In the end, an expected speedy A's offense faltered to an even speedier Mariners team, which frequently put pressure on an uncharacteristically shaky Oakland defense and took advantage of a handful of errors.

The result: a sixth straight Opening Day loss for the A's, who fell, 5-3, to Seattle at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum on Monday night after tallying just five hits while committing four errors as the highly anticipated A's debut of Ben Sheets came and went without much fanfare.

Heading into the season, the A's realized that offense wasn't exactly going to be their forte. A solid running game, along with a sturdy and consistent defensive showing was supposed to keep them in games.

That was the plan, anyway.

The defensive part of that notion, though, was missing Monday. And the running aspect? Well, that partly cost them the game as well.

Three of Seattle's runs came courtesy of Oakland errors, including the final two that gave the Mariners the win. With the score tied at 3 entering the ninth, righty Brad Ziegler put two runners on base before handing the ball over to closer Andrew Bailey with two outs.

Bailey, who was honored with his 2009 American League Rookie of the Year award before the game, immediately induced a Chone Figgins grounder to third base, where Kevin Kouzmanoff grabbed the ball before making a high throw to first for an error.

Rather than escaping the inning unscathed, Bailey suddenly found himself facing Casey Kotchman with the bases loaded. With a 3-2 count against Seattle's No. 3 hitter, Bailey allowed a hard-hit liner into center field that plated two runs.

"I was just trying to get a pitch to hit, and the next thing you know it was a 3-and-2 count," Kotchman said. "I was able to get a ball out of the infield. I hit it in the right spot, and I'll take it."

Kouzmanoff's costly error wasn't the only surprise of the game. Catcher Kurt Suzuki, who tallied just five errors last season, committed two in Monday's affair. The second, a throwing error that sailed into center field in an attempt to nail Figgins at second base, led to the second of Kotchman's four RBIs when the Mariners' first baseman hit a sacrifice fly to make it 3-0 in the third.

By that time, the A's had only tallied one hit -- an infield single off the bat of Rajai Davis to lead off the game -- in their efforts to aid Sheets. The Oakland righty, making his first start since 2008, lasted just five innings and gave up three runs on four hits (two earned) while walking four and fanning three in his A's debut.

Sheets struggled in the first frame, giving up two walks and a double en route to throwing 23 of his 94 pitches. The next four innings, though not stellar, went smoother for the righty and gave Sheets confidence heading into his next start.

"I thought I got better as the night went on," said Sheets, who allowed just three more hits and one earned run -- a solo shot by Rob Johnson -- over his final four innings. "I'm actually pleased, not really with the results, but how I ended. I think I started getting in a good rhythm there."

Said manager Bob Geren: "It wasn't his best outing, but when he was done he said he's close to being right where he needs to be. I believe him."

Still, the always honest Sheets wasn't about to downplay his rocky first outing, which resulted in a no-decision.

"It took entirely way too many pitches to throw five innings," he said. "I walked too many guys and made too many pitches, but I'm glad to get that first one over with."

Meanwhile, his counterpart kept the A's in check through most of the night. Seattle starter Felix Hernandez allowed just five base runners through the first five innings before Ryan Sweeney delivered an RBI single in the sixth to put Oakland on the board.

Seattle's ace righty departed after a pair of walks with two outs in the seventh, but was immediately charged with another two runs when Pennington and Davis hit back-to-back RBI singles to tie the game against the Mariners bullpen.

The A's could have potentially scored again had their running game not slipped in the frame. Pennington was tagged out running to third on Davis' single right after Travis Buck scored, but had the A's shortstop halted at second, the club would have still had runners at first and second with two out.

"That was probably a big mistake," Pennington said. "It probably cost us the ballgame."

Hard to say, but it didn't help. Neither did the A's defensive woes, which significantly stood out thanks to a high-speed opponent -- the same one Oakland faces seven times in its first 10 games.

"Anytime anyone runs, it puts pressure on the defense," Pennington said. "It's gonna be like that every night, so we have to learn how to respond better.

"That's the type of team we're going to have to beat."

Chavez opens season in DH role

A's veteran spent most of Spring Training at first base

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 4/6/2010

OAKLAND -- Eric Chavez still carries four gloves with him on a daily basis.

The probability of him using any of them, though, is seemingly becoming more and more unlikely.

That's the message he took from the club's decision to designate slugger Jack Cust for assignment on Saturday. Both general manager Billy Beane and skipper Bob Geren made it clear to reporters that day that Chavez would resume full-time designated hitter duties. However, two days later, neither Beane nor Geren have yet to speak to Chavez about the situation.

"I really don't know what the plan is for me right now," Chavez said Monday as the A's prepared to open the season against the visiting Mariners. "I'm not sure if I'm playing at first a little still. They haven't really told me anything."

Luckily, Monday's Opening Night lineup let him know he's the DH. Where he'll be Tuesday, or a week from now, is unknown.

"That's a really good question, because I just planned on Jack being the DH from the beginning and they were going to need me on the field," Chavez said. "So things have changed. I really don't know what they want me to do. I'll just kind of play it by ear and make adjustments as we go along. They know I can play in the field, I just don't know how much they want me there."

The 32-year-old Chavez appeared in 13 games at first base this spring and broke camp with the assumption that he'd be playing three to four times a week there during the regular season. However, Saturday's news has left him questioning why he spent so much time grooming his surgically repaired back and shoulders to acclimate to a new position when the club now wants him solely focusing on hitting.

At the same time, Chavez realizes that being a productive offensive contributor was his primary goal heading into camp and understands his newly formed DH role could give him the best chance to fulfill that objective.

"Nobody's told me one thing," Chavez said, "but having to DH, I could play more games. Not throwing a baseball gives me the best opportunity to do that. They're obviously giving me the opportunity to do that, so I'm going to take advantage of it."

Chavez made his 11th Opening Day start, tying Jimmy Dykes for second-most in Oakland history. He also marks the A's sixth different Opening Day DH in the last six years.

"We'll see how he holds up there," Geren said. "Having him in the DH role gives him the best chance to get the at-bats he needs."

At the very least, Chavez is simply pleased to be healthy.

"It definitely feels good to be here," he said. "The goal is not just to be here Opening Day, even though it's definitely a step forward, but to be here at the end of the year. If I'm here at the end of the year, that means I've stayed healthy."

If placed in the DH role on a fairly regular basis, Chavez will have to specifically keep watch on his right shoulder. The back-and-forth movement involved with swinging a bat, though, doesn't give him any back issues.

Health will continue to be a question for the remainder of Chavez's career, but for now he'd rather just concentrate on the task at hand.

"All I know is I'm DH'ing tonight, and it's going to be fun for me to be out there," he said. "I have a job. I'm employed. I have a uniform. I'll do whatever they want me to do."

Cahill out indefinitely with neck pain

OAKLAND -- Entering Monday's opener, little was known about the injury forcing A's starter Trevor Cahill to start the season on the 15-day disabled list.

Cahill, who competed with Gio Gonzalez for the fifth spot in the rotation all spring before revealing a left scapula stress reaction Saturday, couldn't offer much more information Monday.

In fact, the A's righty has "no idea" when he'll return to the mound. He said the neck pain began at the end of last season and resurfaced following his Minor League start on March 29, but the only thing he can do at the moment is to not do anything.

"They told me to take a few days off from throwing," Cahill said, "and then we'll take it from there."

The 22-year-old pitcher made 32 starts as a rookie last season and was expected to have the edge for a rotation spot entering camp. However, his injury -- combined with a strong showing from Gonzalez -- led the A's to go with the left-hander. Gonzalez is slated to make his 2009 debut in Anaheim on Friday.

Worth noting

Right-hander Michael Wuertz (shoulder) threw at a distance of 80 feet Sunday and was scheduled to throw again Monday. He'll continue rehabbing with the team until he's ready to make a Minor League appearance. ... Coco Crisp (pinkie fracture) reiterated Monday he's unsure of a timetable on his return to the field. The A's outfielder could be out 3-8 weeks. ... Before Monday's home opener, Andrew Bailey was presented his 2009 American League Rookie of the Year award by former A's shortstop Walt Weiss, who garnered the same accolade in 1988. Bert "Campy" Campaneris was also honored for his induction into the Bay Area Sports Hall of Fame. ... Mark Ellis has now started an Oakland record seven Opening Day games at second base in the last eight years. The previous record was held by Dick Green. ... Travis Buck became the A's 11th different Opening Day starter in left field in the last 11 years, and Ben Sheets represented the club's fifth different starting pitcher in the last five years.

Lee's Leftovers: Meet your 2010 A's

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 4/5/2010

With all the commotion going on this weekend, it may have been hard to keep track of who is on the Opening Day roster and who is not. So just to be clear heading into tonight's opener, here are your 25:

Pitchers (12): Ben Sheets, Dallas Braden, Justin Duchscherer, Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez, Brad Ziegler, Andrew Bailey, Craig Breslow, Chad Gaudin, Edwar Ramirez, Jerry Blevins, Tyson Ross

Catcher: Kurt Suzuki

Infielders (7): Daric Barton, Mark Ellis, Cliff Pennington, Kevin Kouzmanoff, Adam Rosales, Eric Patterson, Jake Fox

Outfielders (4): Travis Buck, Rajai Davis, Ryan Sweeney, Gabe Gross

DH (1): Eric Chavez

Note: Fox is the club's backup catcher to Suzuki, and Patterson can also play in the outfield.

See y'all tonight at the Coliseum!

Kara's Hot Corner: Finally.

Kara Tsuboi, mlb.com, 4/6/2010

The moment we've all been waiting for is upon us: OPENING DAY! Despite the gloomy Bay Area weather and head-scratching roster moves, there are a lot of reasons to be excited for tonight's season opener vs. the Seattle Mariners, and in fact, the entire 2010 season. Here's what I'm most looking forward to:

- A healthy team. How great to have Chavy back in the lineup and Duke on the mound?! Of course, the Coco Crisp and Michael Wuertz injury news is disappointing, but we've got to expect and anticipate hiccups like these along the way.
- New fan favorites. Kevin Kouzmanoff, Jake Fox and Adam Rosales to name a few...
- Fresh, young talent. After watching Chris Carter and Michael Taylor at Spring Training, I'm optimistic for what's coming down the pipeline. I have a feeling we'll be seeing these two in the Coliseum before the All Star break.
- FANS. It's people like you who make the A's fan experience as special as it is. From our die-hard, 81-gamers to our youngins' out to see Stomper, it's you the team is playing for and you who makes my job so meaningful.

And speaking of fans, here are 2 pictures I snapped at Saturday's game vs. the Giants that just make me smile! It's going to be a great season everyone -- I can't wait to spend it with you at the Oakland Coliseum!

Stars old and new shine on Opening Day

Pujols cements his legend; Heyward writes first chapter of his

By John Schlegel / MLB.com

Dear Sir: This is to inform you that you officially own Opening Day. Congratulations, Albert.

Dear Doc: Your healing touch is welcome in Philadelphia -- but probably not so much in the rest of the National League.

Dear J-Hey: Nice introduction to The Show. Enjoy the shaving cream?

Dear Baseball: Really wonderful to see you again. We missed you so.

And thank you, baseball, for coming back at full force on Monday with a packed-to-the-brim, round-the-clock Opening Day of star performances and thrilling displays of athleticism.

Thank you, baseball, for being worthy of all the pomp and circumstance that preceded each of the 13 Opening Day contests around the country, from President Obama's ceremonial first pitch at Nationals Park to Andrew Bailey receiving his 2009 American League Rookie of the Year Award at the Oakland Coliseum.

Dear Baseball: What else could you have given us Opening Day? Seriously.

Sir Albert Pujols goes deep twice, and with vigor, to lead the Cardinals to an 11-6 victory in Cincinnati, marking his second two-homer opener in five years and showing that he's primed for another run at the NL Most Valuable Player Award.

Roy Halladay shakes off a first-inning run for a strong seven-inning debut with the Phillies in an 11-1 win for the defending NL champs, getting them off to a good start toward what would be a historic NL three-peat.

And even with all that well-established star power, it's hard to top Jason Heyward's spectacular first at-bat in the Majors: a three-run homer that sent Turner Field into an absolute tizzy, including his parents in the stands cheering their hometown kid, before Atlanta rolled on for a 16-5 win.

For a 20-year-old performing in his first Opening Day in the Majors, it was a lot to handle before he even stepped to the plate. There was receiving the ceremonial first pitch in what might amount to a pass-the-torch ceremony from Hall of Famer Hank Aaron, and watching legendary manager Bobby Cox trot out to the foul line for the last time, doffing his cap in his farewell season.

And then there was Heyward himself, crushing a Carlos Zambrano fastball into the bullpen in right-center field on the third pitch he'd seen in the big leagues.

Bedlam in Atlanta.

"I felt my legs, but I couldn't hear myself think," Heyward said afterward, still smiling through the celebratory shaving-cream treatment he received from his teammates. "It was so loud. You just hear 'Rahhhh' and that was cool."

Turns out, a lot of that roar came from the 60 seats his family and friends bought for this grand opening.

"We were being mobbed by each other," recalled his father, Eugene Heyward. "We were knocking each other's hats and glasses off. We just saw the ball go out, and after that we just erupted. It was unbelievable."

That's Opening Day for you. Now just wait for what the next 161 games have to offer -- and in Heyward's case, perhaps the next 20 years or so.

Heyward's smashing debut was merely the peak in a mountain range of an Opening Day, with a no-hitter scare turning into a walk-off in Texas; one of the most amazing defensive plays that will be made this year, from Chicago's Mark Buehrle; and a host of highlights that remind us that, as special as all of it was, baseball does these kinds of things every single day.

And it happens all around the country, from coast to coast, just like it did on Monday.

In Cincinnati, there was center fielder Colby Rasmus grabbing one off the top of the fence with his glove and knocking one over with his bat, helping Pujols and ace starter Chris Carpenter beat the Reds.

In Phoenix, there was the D-backs' Stephen Drew taking all four bases with an inside-the-park homer that helped Arizona to a 6-3 defeat of San Diego, backing up a dominating start by Dan Haren.

In Anaheim, there was World Series MVP Hideki Matsui and new teammate Kendry Morales going back-to-back in the eighth inning with two of three Opening Night homers for the defending AL West champion Halos in a 6-3 win over the defending AL Central champion Twins.

In Washington, there was Placido Polanco making huge noise in his first game back with the Phillies, driving in six runs and hitting a grand slam, giving Halladay and Ryan Howard, who also homered, some support.

In Pittsburgh, there was Garrett Jones homering in each of his first two at-bats in his first Opening Day, showing that the promise of his 2009 performance is ready to be realized in 2010 and thrilling the sellout crowd at PNC Park along the way, leading the Pirates to an 11-5 win over the Dodgers.

"I couldn't have dreamed it any better," said Jones.

That's Opening Day for you. It really is the stuff of dreams. But a lot of what happened can happen any old day in baseball - Jones will have another two-homer game, and Polanco will crank out another big day at the plate for the Phillies.

Then again, there's stuff that only happens on Opening Day. For example, this one brought the eighth Opening Day start for three All-Star starters -- Halladay, Buehrle and Roy Oswalt of Houston -- matching Liván Hernández for the most among active pitchers. For Buehrle and Oswalt, it was more of the same, but for Halladay it was the beginning of a new era with the Phillies after spending his whole career with the Blue Jays.

"Strangely, I felt very comfortable," Halladay said after his seven-inning victory. "I felt very normal."

Normal to Halladay means dominating, and after allowing that first-inning run, he was just that. It couldn't have come as a surprise to anyone.

What Buehrle did in his eighth Opening Day start, well, nobody could have predicted.

The seven shutout innings? Predictable for the Windy City's Mr. No-Hitter. Kicking a comebacker, racing across the first-base line in front of the runner and hiking the ball with his glove between his legs to the bare hand of first baseman Paul Konerko for the out? Not so predictable.

"When stuff like that happens, it surprises me, just like it did 40,000 people here today," Buehrle said. "It's one of those when you are running over, you see a play happening, you are saying, 'Do I slide and spin or grab the ball and throw it?' Every thought went through my head but that one."

Oswalt's eighth start didn't work out as well as the others', but his mound opponent had something to do with that. Tim Lincecum has two Cy Young seasons behind him, and he might have started a third with seven shutout innings in a 5-2 Giants win at Minute Maid Park.

That's Opening Day for you. Aces get aced out. That's the kind of thing that happened all day long, and happens all season long.

In Kansas City, both aces got aced out, as a duel of AL Cy Young candidates Zack Greinke of the Royals and Justin Verlander of the Tigers went pretty much as one would expect, with a tight game going into the late innings, before Detroit got to the K.C. bullpen for an 8-4 win.

In Oakland, ace Felix Hernandez gave the Mariners all they needed with 6 2/3 stellar frames, but the A's tied it up after he left, only to hand it back to the Mariners on a two-run single by Casey Kotchman off Bailey in the ninth for a 5-3 Seattle victory.

In Milwaukee, the leadoff hitter with the most appropriate nickname in baseball for his spot -- CarGo -- got the Rockies going, as Carlos Gonzalez put together a four-hit day and Ian Stewart homered to make a 5-3 winner out of Ubaldo Jimenez and the Rockies over Yovani Gallardo and the Brewers.

In Arlington, the Rangers' vaunted offense was powerless -- and hitless -- against Blue Jays starter Shaun Marcum into the seventh inning. But Nelson Cruz not only whacked a three-run homer to tie the score that inning, Texas came back to tie it in the ninth, setting up Jarrod Saltalamacchia's game-winning single for a 5-4 walk-off victory.

In New York, David Wright homered in his first at-bat after going deep for just 10 last year. The Marlins could not break through against Johan Santana, and the Mets made this Citi Field opener a 7-1 winner.

"This is the type of ballclub we have to be, day in and day out," Mets manager Jerry Manuel said.

And there's the point of Opening Day: For all the excitement that it brings, it really is just the start of something special.

In that sense, this was just the first big day in the life of the 2010 baseball season. Sir Albert, Doc, J-Hey and all the rest of the sport's stars will have other days like this when there isn't bunting on the rails and a military flyover.

On Tuesday there will be one final opener -- Orioles at Rays -- and the teams that started it all on Sunday night, the Yankees and Red Sox, will be back at it again, as the 2,430 games scheduled for the 2010 championship season continue.

Opening Day, for all its glory, is just the beginning of something even bigger. More than anything else, it means baseball is back for another long haul.

Dear Baseball: See you tomorrow, and the next day, and the day after that.

Sheets like a man trying to capture a memory

Lowell Cohn, Press Democrat, 4/6/2010

OAKLAND

The last time Ben Sheets pitched from a major-league mound was 2008. There had been an elbow problem after that and surgery and recovery and a one-year deal with the A's, one year at a cool \$10 million. And when he started for the A's against Seattle on opening night, which should have been opening day, people wondered what he had. Who was he? Could he pitch?

It was the seventh opening day (night) start of his career. He never had lost an opener, but in spring his earned run average was obscene, if things like that ever can be called obscene. It was 11.20 and the other guys batted .354 against him and in one start he couldn't get anyone out. So there were issues.

A review of his spring work would have said his stuff was OK but his command wasn't commanding. That's not a terrific review, although it's better than the other way around — bad stuff, great command. The review also would have mentioned in passing that Sheets is not a lights-out strikeout pitcher the way he used to be. He once struck out 18 and he's had 15 games with 10 or more strikeouts. Those days are over.

On opening night 2010, he pitched like a man trying to capture a memory. The memory, although pleasing, was distant. He glimpsed it across a field on top of a hill and through a mist. Sometimes it was there and sometimes it wasn't. It eluded him, even though it concerned who he had been and what he could do once upon a time and what he wanted to do now.

In the top of the first, he threw 23 pitches. It was a wasteful performance from a man who knew better. He walked Chone Figgins, who stole second and went to third on Kurt Suzuki's throwing error. Figgins scored when Casey Kotchman seared a double to the warning track in center.

Looking at Sheets, you understood he was pitching because the season had started. But he hasn't started, not yet. He was searching for the feel of ball in hand and even though he threw fast and even though his curve was big-league, things were beyond him and he is not yet a No. 1 starter, although he may be some day.

A's manager Bob Geren yanked him after five innings.

"He's improving," Geren said. "He did miss a year. He said he's real close, and I believe him."

Sheets gave up single runs the first three innings — not grotesque but not good. He pitched like a man who loves danger, like someone who doesn't know what's good for him. And he gave up one home run and threw 94 pitches, enough for a complete game if the pitcher is efficient and can remember who he was when he really was somebody.

"I thought I got better as the night went along," Sheets said. "It took me entirely too long to get through five innings."

Sheets is this year's big acquisition by the A's. The A's generally seem to get someone with something wrong with him, someone defined by a lingering question. When I was a kid, my mom would buy me cheap socks with flaws in them and she called them "seconds." The A's often buy seconds and Sheets most definitely is a second.

Their big acquisition last season was Matt Holliday, no second that player. Holliday was a man in a dream when he played in Oakland and although he was not antisocial he never became part of the team. Sheets is different. He wants to be on the A's. He has a sense of humor and he is a leader — even if the A's may trade him by midseason. He refuses to show vulnerability and he's one of those pitchers who will throw until his arm falls off. He is a warrior, if there is such a thing in baseball.

He gave up no runs in his final two innings and looked like a man who, after trying hard to remember something important, was right on the point of grasping the memory and making it real. Ben Sheets strives to remember.

Chavez finds new role with A's

Paul Gutierrez, Sacramento Bee, 4/6/2010

OAKLAND – It's no secret Opening Day occupies a warm spot in the heart, what with the unbridled enthusiasm that comes with the promise of a new day.

What made the A's opener a somewhat surreptitious affair Monday night at the Coliseum, though, was the re-emergence of the once and future face of the franchise. And he was healthy – for the first time in years.

Still searching for a feel-good story to get behind in the land of elephants and the ubiquitous disabled list? Look no further than the corner locker of the A's clubhouse, the one next to the old-school, arcade-style video game. Guy by the name of Eric Chavez.

This was his 12th Opening Day. Most likely, his most gratifying.

And not just because his last name is finally being pronounced properly, though that's a small victory.

This is about Chavez making like Lazarus and showing the doubters that even as his contract is up after this season, he wants to end things on his terms.

Last summer, Chavez was all but done, his body giving out on him. He went under the knife on five occasions in less than 22 months.

Now? He's the A's designated hitter. And he's just as surprised at the development as you are ... and Jack Cust. Especially since the A's in general, and general manager Billy Beane in particular, are so confident in Chavez, 32, dipping into his power-hitting past.

Really, there's no other way to explain the frugal A's choosing to eat \$2.65 million by cutting Cust, who averaged 28 home runs and 76 RBIs the previous three seasons, on the eve of the season.

Chavez hasn't approached those numbers since going deep 27 times and driving in 101 runs in 2005. Then again, Chavez is owed \$12 million, so the A's might merely be looking for a return on their investment, having chosen to pay him rather than Miguel Tejada.

It's all a tad peculiar, given Chavez's work in the field at first base, third base and shortstop this spring. Yet, it makes all the sense in the world.

"We'll see how he holds up," A's manager Bob Geren offered. "The DH role is the best chance to get him in there on a regular basis. I'm looking forward to watching him myself."

But the feel-good story took a wrong turn in the second inning in Chavez's first at-bat. He struck out looking on three Felix Hernández pitches and ended up going 0 for 4 in the A's 5-3 loss to Seattle.

Before the game, Chavez had yet to be told he was the full-time DH.

"The good thing is, they know I can go to the field," he said, adding he totes around four gloves, just in case. "Just having to DH, I can play more games than having to throw a baseball."

Having had his back operated on twice, and two procedures on his right shoulder and another on his left shoulder enables doubt to creep in.

"The goal is not to be here on Opening Day, though that's a nice step forward," Chavez said. "The goal is to be here at the end of the year."

The longest-tenured A's player – he made his big-league debut on Sept. 8, 1998, the same night Mark McGwire broke Roger Maris' single-season home run record with his 62nd in St. Louis – has no airs about him.

He's fine with being on a need-to-know basis. Really.

"I have a job," Chavez said with a knowing wink. "I'm employed. I have a uniform. I'll do it with a smile on my face."

As long as Chavez is healthy and contributing, A's fans should carry a similar expression.

Oakland A's lose season Opener to Seattle Mariners

Claire Reclosado, examiner.com, 4/6/2010

OAKLAND, Calif.---The Oakland A's offense came to life in the second half of the Opening Night game against the Seattle Mariners, but mistakes in the ninth inning led them to a 5-3 loss.

A's started Ben Sheets was shaky early, giving up three runs in the first three innings.

"He's improving, he did miss a year. It wasn't his best outing," Oakland manager Bob Geren said of Sheets. "He said he's real close, he's real close to really being right back where he needs to be and I believe him."

In five innings, Sheets allowed three runs (one unearned) on four hits. One of those runs came from a solo home run to the Mariners' catcher Rob Johnson. Though he gave up the runs early, Sheets finished much stronger and sees that as a positive sign. Eventually he found his rhythm and was pleased with his outing.

The A's rallied in the seventh inning to put two runs on the board and tie the game. Amidst the two-out rally, shortstop Cliff Pennington was tagged out at third base seconds after left-fielder Travis Buck scored their third run. Seattle outfielder Milton Bradley bobbled the ball, which prompted Pennington to try for third base instead of staying at second.

"I was originally trying to draw a throw so that we could score a run to tie the game, but when he [Bradley] bobbled it I needed to shut it down. That was a pretty big mistake because it probably cost us the ballgame," Pennington said after the game. "I should have stopped and gone back to second."

The A's had their chance to keep the game tied in the ninth inning, but instead of ending the inning, third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff committed a throwing error which allowed the Mariners to load the bases.

With game one of a long season in the books, the A's are looking to learn from the experience and improve in all aspects of their game.

"We got the first game out of the way. I know for some of the young guys, me included, it got some of the jitters out," said Pennington. "So, hopefully we can move forward and play better from now on."

Four errors cost the Oakland A's a win on Opening Day

Ryan Leong, examiner.com, 4/6/2010

OAKLAND, Calif -- If the A's are going to live up to their slogan that it's "green collar" baseball, they'd better also put on their hard hat and bring their lunch pail because they've got a lot of work to do.

In his Mariners debut, Casey Kotchman had two hits and drove in four runs as Seattle beats the A's 5-3 in the 2010 Opener. It was the sixth consecutive opener the A's have lost.

"It's a good night for us, we got a 'w'," Kotchman said. "That's what you want to do, especially when you get a good pitching performance from Felix (Hernandez). You don't want it to go to waste. "

Hernandez, the ace for the M's was in line for the win and ended up going 6 2/3rds, allowing three hits and three runs, notching six strikeouts.

"It's a tough thing to take your ace out of the ballgame but you've got to look long term with him and he worked hard," Seattle manager Don Wakamatsu said. "He's cruising early and then all of the sudden the emotions got to him.

"There were some pitches that were pretty close that didn't get called but at the end it was a great performance by him and the bullpen to come in and hold it and save it."

Ben Sheets in his first start for Oakland had a decent outing, pitching five innings, allowing four hits, three runs (two earned), four walks, while striking out three.

In the first inning after Ichiro popped out, Chone Figgins walked, stole second and advanced to third on the catcher's throwing error to center field.

Kotchman doubled to deep right center scoring Figgins. Sheets walked Milton Bradley but was able to throw him out at second on a caught stealing. Ken Griffey Jr. struck out to end the frame.

The Mariners doubled that lead in the second when Rob Johnson cranked a 3-1 fastball into the left field seats. Seattle scored a third run on a sacrifice fly by Kotchman in the third.

After that, Sheets settled down and did not allow a run the last two innings he pitched.

"I thought I got better as the night went on," said Sheets who pitched in the Majors for the first time during the regular season since 2008. "It just took me entirely too many pitches for me to get through five innings and I'll work on that. I've been feeling a lot better each and every time. I'm looking forward to cleaning everything up."

The A's scored their first run in the 6th on an RBI single from Ryan Sweeney. In the seventh, Cliff Pennington and Rajai Davis added run scoring singles.

Pennington was over anxious and was thrown out at third when the A's could have had two runners on base and Daric Barton at bat.

"That was a pretty big mistake because it probably cost us the ballgame," Pennington said. "I should have stopped and gone back to second and have Barton up with two outs and a runner on second and a chance to win the ballgame."

After a one out walk to Mariners catcher Rob Johnson, and an intentional walk to Ichiro to put runners on first and second, A's manager Bob Geren replaced Brad Ziegler with closer Andrew Bailey.

Chone Figgins hit a routine ground ball to third but Kevin Kouzmanoff's throw sailed high to first base forcing Barton to leap off the bag and now the bases were loaded with two outs.

The fourth error of the game proved costly. Kotchman then hit a single to left center scoring the winning runs.

"It's one of things, it's the game of baseball," Bailey said. "It's not (Kevin's) fault, it's not anyone's fault. They just got good wood on it there and blooped it into center and two runs scored so I can't really do anything else but tip my cap to him and get him next time."

In the bottom of the ninth, David Aardsma overpowered the A's, striking out Mark Ellis and Travis Buck looking to end the game.

"It was a tight game and it's just one game but you want to make the most out of the opportunities that you get and we were able to come out with a 'w'," Kotchman said.

Green and gold notes: There was a pregame ceremony honoring Bert Campaneris being inducted into the Bay Area Hall of Fame. "Campy" received a plaque from his teammate, catcher and current A's broadcaster Ray Fosse. ... A's closer Andrew Bailey was awarded his Rookie of the Year plaque and given to him by Sacramento Bee writer Paul Gutierrez and 1988 A's Rookie of the Year Walt Weiss. ... For the National Anthem, the Oakland Police department had its officers unveiled a flag in memory of the four slain officers who lost their lives in 2009. ...The highlight of the opening night festivities was the St. Mary's Gaels Basketball team being recognized for their appearance in the Sweet 16. Guard Mickey McConnell threw out the first pitch. ... Oakland hasn't won on opening day since April 5, 2004 when they posted a 5-4 win over Texas. ... The A's also tied their opening day record for errors and set another record with four grounded into double plays. ... C Kurt Suzuki committed two errors for the first time in his career. He only had five errors all of last season.

Mariners spoil A's opener

AP, 4/6/2010

OAKLAND — Casey Kotchman hit a go-ahead two-run single with two outs in the ninth inning to go along with two earlier RBIs in an impressive Seattle debut, lifting the Mariners to a 5-3 season-opening victory against the Oakland Athletics on Monday night.

Kotchman hit an RBI double in the first and a third-inning sacrifice fly that staked ace Felix Hernandez to a 3-0 lead Seattle couldn't keep to get him the win.

Brandon League (1-0) pitched the eighth for the victory and David Aardsma finished with a 1-2-3 ninth for his first save.

Milton Bradley shattered his bat into several splinters after pounding it to the ground in frustration following a strikeout to end the ninth. He was booed all night by his former fans. Bradley spent the 2006 season and part of '07 with Oakland.

Brad Ziegler (0-1) took the loss after allowing a pair of unearned runs and no hits.

Hernandez looked strong until running into trouble in the seventh inning of a solid 2010 debut. He allowed three hits and three runs, struck out four and walked six in 6» 2-3 innings.

Hernandez, a 19-game winner who hopes to challenge for the AL Cy Young Award again this season, took the mound for the first time since "King Felix" was rewarded with a new \$78 million, five-year contract in January.

He was done after allowing consecutive two-out walks in the seventh, when the A's tied it at 3 on back-to-back RBI singles by Cliff Pennington and Rajai Davis.

New A's \$10 million ace Ben Sheets labored through five rough innings in his first start since late 2008, having already reached 80 pitches through four.

Chone Figgins — Seattle's speedy new No. 2 hitter — stole two bases and scored twice for the Mariners, who are expected to contend for the division crown in manager Don Wakamatsu's second season.

This marked the first of seven meetings between the AL West rivals in the first 10 games of the season.

Sheets pitched in a major league game for the first time since Sept. 27, 2008, while with Milwaukee. The 31-year-old right-hander missed all of last season while recovering from elbow surgery on his throwing arm — and Oakland general manager Billy Beane took a big gamble that the four-time All-Star can return to top form this year. He struggled with his command during spring training.

Seattle provided an early glimpse of the potential of the Mariners' remade lineup featuring Figgins at the top of the order batting behind leadoff man Ichiro Suzuki.

"It's like having two leadoff guys," A's manager Bob Geren said.

Figgins stole second in each of the first two innings, advancing to third on catcher Kurt Suzuki's errors both times before scoring on Kutchman's RBIs.

Ken Griffey Jr., the 40-year-old designated hitter in his 22nd season, had an eighth-inning double.

Before the game, Griffey acted like an excited rookie in the very stadium where he produced his first major league hit back in 1989.

"A double to left," he said with a grin while recalling that hit off Dave Stewart.

Suzuki sneaked up on the slugger at a clubhouse table before batting practice and the two stars pulled off an elaborate fist-bumping routine that ended with Griffey pounding his chest as they both giggled.

Eric Chavez went 0 for 4 in his return to the A's as the team's regular designated hitter. The former six-time Gold Glove third baseman played in only eight games last season and has undergone five operations since Sept. 5, 2007.

He is in the final season of a \$66 million, six-year contract extension he signed in March 2004 that includes a 2011 club option.

Four A's-clad fans among the 30,686 in attendance carried two banners: "Lew Wolff HatesOakland" and "Keep Our A's in Oakland" while two others banged drums as they took their message about the team's owner through the stands.

NOTES: AL Rookie of the Year Andrew Bailey of the A's was presented with his award before the game. ... Mickey McConnell of the Sweet 16 Saint Mary's team — with Omar Samhan and other teammates and coaches watching from around the mound — threw out the ceremonial first pitch. The players were cheered and congratulated as they made their way through the stands to the field. "This is awesome," athletic director Mark Orr said. "What's cool is in the stands they're yelling 'Saint Mary's!'" McConnell's throw was high and outside — not as spot-on as his 3-pointer.

So Far, So-So for Ben Sheets in Return

Jeff Fletcher, aol.com, 4/6/2010

OAKLAND -- Over the previous 555 days, Ben Sheets had faced a lot of hitters ... in his head.

"When you've got a year off, you can do some mental exercises, picture yourself in the game," Sheets said. "You are watching a game and Ken Griffey Jr. comes up, you think about how you've faced him."

And how did Sheets do in those mental matchups?

"I'm sure they didn't get hits."

Reality didn't work out quite so well on Monday night, when Sheets pitched in a major league game for the first time in 18 months. Sheets, who took the ball on Opening Day for the A's, had a mediocre outing, giving up three runs, two earned, in five innings against the Mariners.

It was not the sort of thing you'd like out of your \$10 million investment. Then again, his surgically-repaired elbow remained intact, so he's got that going for him.

"I was actually pleased, not really at the results, but how I ended. I feel I'm starting to get a little more rhythm. My stuff is getting a little better."

-- *BEN SHEETS* As Sheets stood at his locker afterward, with his shoulder packed in ice, he was asked if he's beyond the point of worrying about his arm.

"I'm always worried about how it will feel tomorrow morning, even before I had surgery," Sheet said. "I'm going to feel good. I'm pretty sure. I've been feeling great every time out, feeling better between starts."

Sheets is going to be a guy worth watching closely all year -- perhaps the only one on an A's team that looks destined for another last-place finish. He is a potential ace, someone who was making the seventh Opening Day start of his career. He missed all of 2009, though, while recovering from surgery to repair a torn flexor tendon. Big-league clubs were rightfully skeptical about what he'd have this year, so he remained unsigned until January, when the A's, of all teams, won his services with a \$10 million, one-year offer.

Thing is, hardly anyone expects Sheets to be on the A's when the season ends. Unless the A's defy the experts and contend, he figures to be one of the top names on the trade market in July.

As long as he's healthy and effective.

So far, he looks healthy.

As for the stuff, he had his fastball popping at 90-92 mph. His curve ball was sharp. The problem was his command. He walked four batters. He left a fat pitch over the middle that Mariners catcher Rob Johnson jacked over the left-field fence for a solo homer.

He didn't get much help from the A's defense. Two throwing errors by catcher Kurt Suzuki contributed to one of the runs. (Although Sheets probably contributed to Suzuki rushing his throw by not holding the Chone Figgins very close at first.)

The best news for Sheets was that he finished strong, retiring the Mariners in order in the fifth.

"I was actually pleased, not really at the results, but how I ended," Sheets said. "I feel I'm starting to get a little more rhythm. My stuff is getting a little better. I think it's going to be a good year."

Manager Bob Geren, who is unfailingly positive, said he didn't expect Sheets to be in midseason form the first time out in 18 months.

"It wasn't his best outing," Geren said, "but when he got done he said he's real close to being where he needs to be, and I believe him."

Scouting Notes: Sheets Has Right Stuff, but He'll Be Slow to Progress

Frankie Piliere, aol.com, 4/6/2010

When a player returns from arm trouble, the first thing you look for is the raw stuff. Is the crispness to the fastball back? And, in the case of a pitcher like Ben Sheets, has the snap on that signature curveball returned as well? Sheets proved on Monday that his plus stuff was back and that he is 100 percent healthy. However, it may take some time for the other part of his game -- command -- to bounce back.

It's been a long time since Sheets saw consistent big-league action, and it's only logical to expect his sharp command to be slow to return. Early on in Monday's action, his struggles with location were very apparent.

The Athletics had to be tremendously pleased with how crisp his stuff looked. The fastball was there, as he showed off a lively 91-93 mph fastball that reached as high as 94. He did have trouble consistently keeping the ball down in the zone but the good life was there and it was coming out of his hand nicely.

More importantly for the big right-hander, the curveball was as sharp as ever. He had his usual sharp, downward 12-6 action, and when he was locating it, it was close to unhittable for the Seattle offense. He sat around 78-80 mph with the hook, and it was his go-to pitch throughout the night.

As lively as the fastball looked from Sheets, his command got him into trouble. He was consistently up in the zone, and while he was able to change hitters' eye levels with his curve, eventually a pitcher is bound to get burned by living up in the zone with a fastball that is anything less than in the mid-to-upper 90s.

By the middle innings, Sheets' velocity dropped noticeably as he began to live in the 89-91 mph range. At that point, the command came and went. Stamina certainly is going to be an issue in the early part of the season for him as well, and that will impact both command and velocity. Still, you have to like the flashes of superb stuff and what he was able to get done while he battled through these problems.

All of this is unsurprising for a pitcher in Sheets' situation. It's a little unreasonable to expect consistent results early in the season, but, as good as his stuff looked early in the game and as dynamic as his breaking ball was on Opening Day, Oakland should be able to look forward to an ace-caliber pitcher at full strength in the coming months. Once he has his legs under him and his mechanics at a point where he can repeat them, Sheets is going to be as difficult as ever to hit. Until then, expect solid but uneven results.

Quick Hits

- Here's a frightening thought for National League hitters. Tim Lincecum may be getting better. The reigning Cy Young Award-winner two years running is becoming more of a three-weapon pitcher as he showed Monday night in Houston. He's been a three-pitch pitcher in the past, but hitters have always been most aware of that devastating changeup.

His breaking ball, though, looked nearly as outstanding against a baffled Astros lineup Monday. He showed the ability to front-door a sharp breaking ball against right-handed hitters and drop it on the back foot of lefties. Given how often he likes to go down and in with his changeup against lefties, having another pitch along with the fastball that he can use in that quadrant is close to unfair. If he can mix these two plus secondary pitches like he did on Monday with his 92-95 mph fastball, it could be an even tougher year for National League hitters when Lincecum is on the mound.

- Major league debuts don't get much better than Jason Heyward's. Yes, he launched a no-doubt homer in his first major league at-bat, but Heyward was impressive throughout the game. He just does not waste a single at-bat. It sounds cliché, but there are very few players his age -- or any age in all of baseball -- that string together quality at-bats like he does. As he showed on Monday, he will take pitches looking for the one that he can put his A swing on.

In addition, he has the outstanding hand-eye coordination to make pitchers pay when he gets the one offering for which he is looking. As we watch him evolve throughout this season, keep an eye on how few poor swings he takes. He doesn't take many hacks, but when he does he makes them count.

Ellis is the senior citizen of Oakland A's ballclub

By HARRELL MILLER, Napa Valley Register, Tuesday, April 6, 2010

PHOENIX — If you have any doubts about the Athletics' current youth movement, consider this. Mark Ellis, the A's 32-year-old second baseman, is the oldest member of the team. He's just a tad older than Oakland's other two 32-year-olds, Eric Chavez and Justin Duchscherer.

Ellis is several games behind Eric if you look at games played in an A's uniform, but, with Chavez's health problems of late, Mark is moving up quickly in that category as well.

Before the A's broke spring training camp and headed north for the 2010 season, I asked Ellis about how he felt about being the senior member of the squad.

He laughed.

"To be 32 and the oldest guy on the team really feels good. It's a great place to be. What we're trying to do is develop the young players."

We'd talk about those young players later, but first I wanted to know about the shortstops he had played with since becoming half of the A's double play combination back in 2002.

He said he played a little while with Miguel Tejada, but the majority of his games have been with Bobby Crosby, at least when one of them was not on the disabled list.

Bobby joined the A's a year after Mark and was Rookie of the Year in 2004.

However, Ellis was benched with an injury.

"I missed all of 2004," Mark explained. "Bobby and I collided in spring training going for a ball up the middle. I dislocated my right shoulder. We had three days left of camp. I missed the whole year."

I couldn't help but ask about the classic Crosby/Ellis look which I always enjoyed. They wore their long green socks with their pant legs up just below their knees. They looked like a keystone combination right out of the old Philadelphia Athletics.

Mark laughed when he explained, "Crosby had to wear his pants up because he is so bowlegged. I just went along with him.

"I wear them down now. It's easier to get dressed. I just pull my pants on. I don't have to blouse them out and all that stuff."

With Crosby gone, the shortstop position is still being decided.

"You have to have a good camaraderie up the middle," Mark said when I asked him what he thought was going to happen at that position.

"Cliff (Pennington) and I are developing a little bit of a bond, but it takes a while.

"I haven't gotten to know him that well, but, I think he's going to be the guy."

Mark is from South Dakota, but went to college at the University of Florida.

His college career was a bit different from today's norm.

Most players leave their colleges with pro contracts at the end of their junior year.

In Mark's case, he simply didn't get an offer he liked, so he returned for a fourth year.

"When you stay a fourth year, you feel a little like you're been left behind since all your buddies are gone," he recalled.

His performance, however, as a senior must have sweetened the pot. He hit .344 with 10 home runs, 42 RBIs and 20 stolen bases.

That was enough to attract Kansas City's attention. He was drafted in the ninth round of the free agent draft in June of 1999.

He was traded to Oakland in January 2001, and played the whole year at Sacramento. In 2002 he started the year with the River Cats (21 games) but finished with the Athletics — where he has been Mr. Second Base ever since.

I've always wondered how major league players handled bad days when they come along as they seem to have a way of doing.

So, I asked if it really was possible to move on to the next inning or the next at-bat or the next game.

"I didn't used to be able to," Mark recalled. "Before I got married and had kids I used to take it home with me, and it would stay with me all through the night.

"When I got married it got a lot better. And, now that I have kids (Briggs, 3, and Adelaide, 9 months), when I leave the field, the game is over. I don't care whether I made three errors and went 0 for 5.

"I'm just a better ballplayer with a wife and kids at home."

Finally, I was curious about what a player of Mark's stature does during the offseason.

"I usually take about a month and let the season go," he said. "I don't think about baseball at all. I spend time with the family and maybe play a little golf.

"In January I start thinking about baseball again — picking up a bat, throwing a ball.

"Our home is here in Arizona, so I can go out to Papago (the A's training facility) and get involved in all sorts of workouts.

"Living here means that I'm also home for spring training. That's a big plus."

Ellis could not have been nicer in the half hour we spent sitting in front of his locker in the A's dressing room.

He has been one of my baseball heroes for a number of years. Turns out he is just as cool in person as he is around second base.

I'm not sure what the season holds for the boys in the green and gold, but, once again there is every reason to assume they'll be strong up the middle — and No. 14 will be a key to that strength.

Billy Beane Visits Athletics Nation: New Season Edition 2010 Part 2

Tyler Bleszinski, Athletics Nation, 4/6/2010

Yesterday was part one and today is the conclusion of AN's exclusive season opening interview with A's GM Billy Beane. I'll again put up the caveat that we did this interview on Monday, March 29, so some of the answers might seem a little dated. Also, I want to personally thank Billy who did an interview with me on his birthday after he had very little sleep the night before because his twins were keeping him up. We were two tired dads during this interview.

Any way, thanks to Billy Beane for taking the time and I hope you enjoyed this interview on the opening days of the 2010 baseball season.

Blez: I've read that the plans right now seem to be leaning towards the A's splitting the time between Daric Barton and Eric Chavez at first base as long as Chavez remains healthy. Why does that seem to be the plan right now when Barton has had a great spring thus far and Chavy has struggled a bit. Barton also seemed to finally come into his own last year.

Beane: We haven't gone with any plan yet, so you have to be careful what you're reading. Eric will be the first to tell you that he's not an everyday player. What we want to do is to utilize his skills as much as possible. Daric comes in as the incumbent and he's always been a guy that we've thought very highly of and he finished up strong last year. He continues to take it into the spring. It's a story not yet written. It's hard to ignore Daric's most recent development, but we have another week left in spring and Eric has held up well. We also have to give Eric Chavez the benefit of the doubt in that he's been out for a couple of years. We should be happy that he's healthy, that he's been able to go out there all during the spring and give him a chance to get his sea legs underneath him. With the way Daric has played though, it's hard to ignore that. I think there will be plenty of opportunities for anyone that is healthy, that's for sure.

Blez: Tell me about the rotation. You've got Sheets, coming off injury, Justin Duchscherer who missed a year, Braden who, gotta love him, gets in there despite an apparent staph infection...

Beane: He didn't have a staph infection. Dr. Braden was not correct in his diagnosis (laughs).

Blez: Then you've got Brett Anderson and Gio Gonzalez or Trevor Cahill for the number five spot. How do you feel about the starting pitching?

Beane: Well it's deeper. As you said, there is some risk with some of those guys given their history. I think we have to be prepared. In a perfect world, you begin the season with five starters and you end with the same five. But that just hasn't been the case with us or most organizations. The good thing this year is that we have other options if someone stumbles due to injury or otherwise. We haven't had that in a few years. The thing we're dealing with right now is some nicks in the bullpen which was a strength for us last year. That's why we acquired Ramirez from Texas and then yesterday got Chad Gaudin. Gaudin is a very versatile guy. He can long man, pitch in the set up role and he can also start. He's a very valuable guy if health comes into question as it often does during the season.

Blez: As with the past few seasons with the A's, the bullpen appears to be the strong point. How are you feeling about the pen right now in spite of all the injuries?

Beane: It'll be easier to answer when we actually start. We've got (Andrew) Bailey who is feeling good. He's throwing in today's game and we'll breathe a sigh of relief when he gets a couple of games under his belt. (Craig) Breslow is feeling good. I don't think he's scheduled today, but we do feel better about him. The guy we don't know about but should have more information later today is Mike Wuertz and his status. It's safe to say that Mike be a little delayed in terms of starting the season. We don't know that for sure but he's had a slow spring with a shoulder problem. If he started the season on the DL, it wouldn't be a total shock. Unfortunately that was one of the ramifications of having so many young starts. As good as the bullpen was last year, the carry over winds up affecting this year and some of the things we're dealing with right now. We don't know that for sure, but it's definitely feasible.

Blez: How is Joey Devine doing?

Beane: Joey is coming along. He certainly won't be ready for the beginning of the year, but we're hopeful that we're going to see him sometime during April. It's more likely to be the end of April rather than the beginning. He's had a little bit of a stumble there a few weeks ago and he's starting to throw off the mound now but it's unrealistic to think he's going to be ready until, at the earliest, the end of April.

Blez: You seemingly made the right choice to not make a qualifying offer to Jack Cust as you got him back at less than expected. Were you anticipating it working out that way when you made the decision?

Beane: You have to respect what Jack had accomplished in his time with us. Even though he had been non-tendered, there was still a certain price point where he was still very valuable to us. Ultimately, in our opinion, he reached that. And our team had such little power and to not have the number one power hitter on our club we realized that there was no one to replace him with. From the start, the day he was non-tended we said we would have interest in bringing him back. Both sides were able to come to a mutual agreement that works for both parties and hopefully Jack goes out and gets back to his 30 home runs and provides that at what we think is a reasonable cost.

Blez: Is the goal to have him as the DH the majority of the time this year?

Beane: Jack gave it a great effort out there, but he'd be the first one to say that given the guys that we have, that he'd be better served to be at the DH spot on a regular basis. The good thing about Jack is that he can go out there. But we are

going to try and keep him in the DH spot because we have some great defensive outfielders on the club. Unless Bob has no other choice, you'll predominantly see Jack DHing.

Blez: Do you think the A's will steal a lot more bases this year since it seemed like once the team got aggressive on the basepaths in the second half, the runs started to come then?

Beane: It was the skills we had and I think Bob utilized it well. At the end of the day, for us to be a high-performing offensive club we have to slug at a higher rate than we did the last couple of years. The ideal thing is that with some speed we develop some power and a little more dynamic offensive with someone like Raj. The thing about stealing bases is that it helps create that mentality of aggressiveness and Bob has done that well. A guy like Raj is going to steal bases no matter where he's at. He's a pretty unique talent, speed wise. What it does from a mentality standpoint is that guys who might not run as well as Raj get into a more aggressive mindset. It's not just stealing bases, but going first to third and taking the extra base on a base hit. I think creating that mentality is as big a positive as anything. Ultimately, having guys like Ryan Sweeney and Kurt Suzuki, who runs very well for his position, you create a mentality of not waiting around for things to happen. It's not just the stolen base in a vacuum. It creates a mentality of aggressiveness throughout the club. Bob did a great job of instilling that in the guys and ultimately guys get confident on the bases as they do at bat. The best way to do it though is to have those guys at the top of the lineup and then get the power guys and then you have a dynamic club. Nobody wants to be one-dimensional where the only way you can score runs is by hitting home runs and the only way you can score runs is by stealing a base. The best teams this franchise has ever had, and if you look back to the '89 team it's a prime example, you had speed and power with Rickey (Henderson) at the top of the lineup and then the big power hitters in the middle. That's ultimately what every team is trying to create. It's something we'd like to do as well.

Blez: You mentioned Rickey. What kind of impact does it have to have Rickey Henderson around folks like Rajai and Coco Crisp?

Beane: He's been great here. He brings a lot of energy and he's smiling all the time. In fact he's been so good that after the first week we brought him down we brought him down again. He's going to continue to work with the organization throughout the season. It's not just about stealing bases. I've talked to Rickey about this and the greatest skill I think Rickey ever had was his ability to take a great at-bat. He forced you to throw a strike and got you deep into the count. He'd take a walk if you were going to give it to him, but if you're going to lay the first pitch in there, he was going to hit it over the fence. He has a lot to offer outside of just leading off and stealing bases. That was just one of the many skills Rickey had. Rickey was also an outstanding defender as well and knew the outfield. He's been great and he's brought a lot of smiles, a lot of energy and a lot of expertise. He's been an absolute pleasure to have around.

Blez: Where do you think you are in terms of rebuilding this team? Have you set benchmarks for what you want the team to be accomplishing in 2010?

Beane: No, if we're healthy I think we'll be taking a tangible step forward in terms of performance. Of course we're going to have to be healthy in order to do that. But it's really hard to project too far into the future because of our payroll limitations. But our immediate goal is to stay healthy and then take a step forward record-wise from where we were last year. Where that takes us is hard to say. We need to get some of these young bats up here and I think once you have the young pitcher and the young bats up here and them all taking steps forward then you can consider yourself a contender. But we still have a ways to go.

Blez: How do you grade a manager in this situation? When does the pressure for success start?

Beane: You have to be realistic. A manager has to have players good enough to win from the outset before you can start to expect them to win. In Bob's situation, we've basically taken his best players away from him every year and provided him with less experienced players so he's done a great job of coming in to do the best job every day with what he's been given. Quite frankly, in '07 and '08, we basically took the most experienced and accomplished players from him, so you have to be realistic with the expectations based on what he's given. One way to measure it is are the young players playing hard for him and are they showing improvement. At this stage, we're pleased with that. Bob has dealt with more injuries than anyone and dealt with a rebuilding situation. He goes into this year with the lowest payroll in the American League. He brings a ton of energy and a can-do attitude. We've been very pleased with what he has done.

Blez: How much stock do you put into statistics like batting average on balls in play, and defense independent pitching statistics? Do you think a hitter has any control over the BABIP or is it all luck? And do you think you can measure the DIPS for a pitcher effectively?

Beane: Oh man. That's probably a question that could take all day to answer. There are so many statistics out there and some have greater weight than others but to say one is more important than another is hard to answer. But they are one of many different statistics we look at. It would take too long to go over each one and deal with how much of it is luck and how much validity each one had. Certainly they are of value and have their proper weight.

Blez: It seems like certain players have a good BABIP each year. Do you think that indicates that there is some control over it?

Beane: It really gets down to a pretty basic theory here I think. If you consistently hit the ball hard, you're going to have a good batting average on balls in play. Take a guy like [Albert Pujols](#) who consistently puts the fat part of the bat onto the baseball and he's going to do well with that stat. If you boil it down to its simplest form and that's if you make hard contact consistently, it's going to usually equal a good hitter.

Blez: I know you're probably already tired of talking about the Moneyball movie, but The Blind Side wound up such a huge hit and really cast a spotlight down on Michael Oher. He was thrust into the public's consciousness in a way I don't think he was expecting. Is there a part of you that's anxious about having an even greater spotlight cast on yourself once it's released? Or at least really very publicly rehashing a lot of the stuff from the book all over again?

Beane: The book has been out for eight years and it continues to sell very well. It has brought some great things into my life, but as I always say it's his talent as much as anything because he's a brilliant writer. As far as the movie is concerned, I don't really think about it too much. As with any movie, my bet is that it won't be identical to the book. Quite frankly, Tyler, I don't think about it much.

Blez: Did you at least hear that (Paul) DePodesta is being played by Jonah Hill now?

Beane: I heard that but I didn't really know who Jonah Hill was until someone told me.

Blez: So you haven't started calling DePo "Superbad" or anything?

Beane: No, I haven't seen the movie Superbad. The discussion for me with the book and the impact has been great, quite frankly. It's changed my life and helped introduce me to people outside the industry who I might have never come in contact with. It's been quite flattering.

Blez: Speaking of meeting people outside the industry, has Brad Pitt contacted you to get to know you in preparation for his character?

Beane: I've had the opportunity to spend some time with him. He's a great guy and really down to earth. I really enjoyed the few times we've gotten together.

Blez: Did you feel like he was studying your mannerisms or anything?

Beane: No, not at all. We've just gotten together and enjoyed the conversation. He was a really good guy and very down-to-earth. More so than you would expect for someone with his kind of fame.

Blez: Finally, how excited are you right now about the 2010 season for the Oakland A's? Are you approaching it with trepidation or are you excited?

Beane: I'm excited about every year. It's the competitor in me. I'm always excited. I always like to get opening day out of the way because I think there's too much focus on opening day when there's such a long haul. I enjoy the cycle of the baseball season. I enjoy the winter but once the winter is over and baseball season comes, I enjoy the whole league playing, the minor leagues starting up, the draft coming and I'm always very optimistic at the beginning of the season. I always have great expectations. I just like to get opening day out of the way because I've never liked opening day.

Blez: Really? Even when you were a player?

Beane: Well as a player it's different. As an executive, you just want to get the hoopla out of the way and get into the rhythms and flows of the season. I remember a few years ago, I think it was 2006, we opened with the Yankees. Barry pitched I think and he went against Randy Johnson and the Yankees and we just got clobbered. Once that night is over, your annual body clock kicks in and there's games on and lots of information being processed. I really start to enjoy that, but it takes a couple of days to get through opening day. One thing I do like about opening day is turning the TV on first thing in the morning and having so many games broadcasted, that's a lot of fun. But I like the rhythm of the season once you get past opening day.

Blez: Where you can get into more of a routine.

Beane: Yeah, very much so. Summer is coming and the weather is turning in the Bay Area. This is my 31st year in the game, so your body gets kind of used to the different seasons and I always look forward to it. I like spring training. One thing I look forward to is going north after being down here for seven weeks because it's gray when you leave with no leaves on the trees and then you get home and every flower in the Bay Area has bloomed and the hills are just green. I look forward to seeing that. I also look forward to driving into the office and seeing Betty (his assistant) who I haven't seen for seven weeks and seeing everyone else. It is a time for optimism. It's the great thing about baseball and spring training. The thing that stinks is that I remember that it was the beginning of the year last year when we started to get the injury bug, I think we were in Texas and Nomar (Garciaparra) and Ellie (Mark Ellis) went down. It was all in a space of one or two games and then you're playing catch up and that's difficult. The hope is to leave spring training healthy and start the season out and get on a little bit of a roll. It is a time I look forward to and I'm very happy when we start once we get past opening day.

Blez: The good news is that it seems like both Duke and Sheets seem relatively healthy right now.

Beane: Cross your fingers. The bullpen is one area that we're trying to work out. The position players are by and large feeling pretty good. A lot of the guys are anxious to get up and start playing. They think spring training is too long. It's because of injuries and getting your pitchers ready is why spring training is as long as it is. If we had to open up two weeks ago, we'd be very short in the bullpen right now.

Blez: I want to thank you for taking the time to talk to me. Happy birthday to you!

Beane: Thank you very much, Tyler.