



SEATTLE MARINERS NEWS CLIPS

April 7, 2010



Mariners fall in 10th on walk-off

Snell tosses six stellar innings in loss to A's

By Jim Street / MLB.com

04/07/10 2:15 AM ET

OAKLAND -- One way to prevent the Mariners from stealing bases, and causing their opponents to make defensive mistakes, is not let anyone get on base.

When that happens, as it did all too often Tuesday night at the Oakland Coliseum, not even the five hitless innings right-hander Ian Snell pitched in a stellar six-inning regular-season debut, and three scoreless innings from the bullpen, were good enough to manufacture a second straight victory.

The superb pitching wasn't enough because an offense that has been suspect from the first day of Spring Training stubbed its toes big-time, resulting in a 2-1, 10-inning loss to the Athletics before a crowd of 10,090.

"It comes down to not scoring runs," manager Don Wakamatsu said. "From four through nine we were 1-for-24 and that's the story of this ballgame. We have to score some runs to take the pressure off the pitching."

The second game of the four-game series was left in the hands of rookie right-hander Kanekoa Texeira, who made his Major League debut in the ninth inning of a 1-1 game, retired the first batter he faced and then proceeded to load the bases with one out.

He took a deep breath, escaped the jam to send the game into extra innings, but could not overcome three singles in the bottom of the 10th, the decisive one stroked by second baseman Mark Ellis with two outs and two on.

"It was unfortunate that you have to leave the young kid out there in his debut," Wakamatsu said. "But he was phenomenal, pitching out of that bases-loaded jam. This game was not his fault."

The only run Seattle scored against starter Dallas Braden was a gift.

Center fielder Franklin Gutierrez reached on a one-out double in the fourth, went to third on a balk and scored on a wild pitch. Only one other Mariners baserunner advanced farther than first base against Braden and four relievers.

Gutierrez, who went 2-for-3 with a walk, and Ichiro Suzuki were the only Mariners batters that didn't strike out at least once. Designated hitter Milton Bradley, the cleanup batter, went 0-for-4 with two strikeouts after going 0-for-3 with two strikeouts and two walks in Monday's season opener.

But Bradley was far from being the lone ranger.

It's only two games, but the team is batting a collective .169 and Braden is known more for his pickoff move -- which he displayed in the first inning when he picked Ichiro off first base -- than the number of games he's won.

Braden has a record of 14-21 in the big leagues, but looked like a Cy Young Award candidate in his first outing of this season.

"We couldn't stay back on [Braden's] changeup and use the other field," Wakamatsu said. "But still, we have to be able to manufacture something and we weren't able to do that."

The Mariners are likely to play a lot of low-scoring games this season, but that didn't soften the blow of having such a solid pitching performance wasted.

"I thought the pitching was outstanding," the manager said. "I thought Ian Snell looked good. He got in a little trouble pitch-count wise, but he gave us six solid innings."

Snell ended Spring Training with a performance against the White Sox that was so poor that he apologized to Wakamatsu and promised a better effort in Oakland.

He was good on his word, taking a no-hitter and one-run lead into the bottom of the fourth inning. But he lost both with one pitch to Athletics catcher Kurt Suzuki, who, with one out, sent a Snell pitch into the seats in left-center field.

It was the only run Snell surrendered and the only inning that he allowed any hits. He departed after six innings and 100 pitches, settling for a no-decision.

It also was the first of two hits for Suzuki, who contributed the second of three singles in the 10th inning.

That the second hit came off Teixeira, the Rule 5 Draft choice from the Yankees organization, added a footnote to the game.

Teixeira and Suzuki grew up in Maui and there is a three-year difference in their ages. Even so, the pitcher said the Athletics catcher was his Little League coach for one year.

"I have known Kurt for a long time; since I was a little kid," Teixeira said.

They met again in the 10th inning on Tuesday.

"I faced Kurt and he got me, but I will get him the next time."

Meanwhile, Ichiro extended his hitting streak against the Athletics to 22 games with a single into left field in the first inning. But he was promptly picked off first base, though neither he nor Wakamatu agreed with umpire Alfonso Marquez's out call.

[Jim Street <mailto:jim.street@mlb.com>](mailto:jim.street@mlb.com) is a reporter for MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

Ichiro eligible for Hall consideration

Mariners right fielder reaches 10 years of MLB service

OAKLAND -- Even if Ichiro Suzuki does not play another game in his Major League career, he became eligible for the Hall of Fame on Monday night.

The first-inning at-bat he had against the Athletics -- a popup to third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff -- gave Ichiro 10 years in the Major Leagues. So whenever he retires, even if it's on Tuesday, he will have qualified for HOF consideration.

Once a player retires, he must wait five years to be considered for HOF candidacy.

Several voters already are on record as saying Ichiro is on the cusp of being a Hall of Famer, citing his MLB record nine consecutive seasons with at least 200 hits. He also holds the single-season hit record -- 262 in 2004.

Ichiro went 1-for-4 in the season opener and scored a run in the ninth inning. It extended his personal hitting streak against Oakland to 21 games, during which he is batting .380 (35-for-92), started on Aug. 24, 2008.

But it is not his longest hitting streak against an opponent.

He had a 26-game streak against the Royals from April 14, 2005, to April 15, 2008, and a 22-gamer against the White Sox from April 27, 2001, to May 11, 2003.

Mariners off and running in 2010

OAKLAND -- A fast tempo that was established during Spring Training came out with a bang on Opening Night, when the Mariners' speed was put to good use.

The Mariners stole 34 bases during the Cactus League season, third behind the White Sox (39) and Angels (37) among American League teams, and swiped three on Monday night.

Second baseman Chone Figgins did what he does best -- stealing bases, scoring runs and causing havoc to the opposing defense with his penchant for putting the game in motion.

"That's what Ichiro [Suzuki] and I are going to do all season: get on base, run and create havoc," Figgins said. "That's the plan, anyway."

It worked so well on Monday night that Figgins went 0-for-3 and scored two of the Mariners' five runs in a two-run victory over the Athletics. Ichiro tried to get into the act, attempting to steal third in the third inning, but was thrown out.

It wasn't the best time for Ichiro to run, for several reasons.

The count was full on Figgins, there was nobody out, and the switch-hitter was batting left-handed, giving Athletics catcher Kurt Suzuki a clear throwing path to third.

"We were aggressive on the bases and got some guys thrown out, but we're going to push the envelope and attack these guys," manager Don Wakamatsu said.

Figgins became the first player in franchise history to steal more than one base on Opening Night. In fact, the team had pilfered only nine bases total on Opening Night, the top being steals by Spike Owen and Dave Henderson in 1985.

The most recent theft in the first game of the season was by Omar Vizquel in 1992.

Felix extends streak of quality starts

OAKLAND -- Ace right-hander Felix Hernandez fell short of winning his third consecutive Opening Night start, but he did keep one streak alive.

He held the Athletics to three runs over 6 2/3 innings, extending his streak of consecutive quality starts to 14 straight, tying a franchise record. The mark was previously held solely by right-hander Erik Hanson, from July 27, 1990, through April 9, 1991.

Hernandez's streak started last Aug. 1, and he has compiled an 8-1 record and 2.16 ERA, allowing 24 earned runs in 100 innings.

First baseman Casey Kotchman has his own streak going.

He handled 13 chances on Monday night without a miscue, his 186th straight game without an error, which is the second-longest active streak by a first baseman in the Major Leagues. Kevin Youkilis of the Red Sox has played 238 consecutive errorless games.

Kotchman's streak nearly ended in the first inning on Monday night.

His throw to shortstop Jack Wilson trying to nail Daric Barton hit the runner in the back and caromed into center field. But the second-base umpire already had ruled that Barton had gone out of the baseline to avoid being tagged out by Chone Figgins.

Worth noting

The four RBIs by first baseman Casey Kotchman on Monday night tied him for the second-most in a Mariners debut. Only Richie Sexson, who drove in five runs on Opening Day against the Twins at Safeco Field in 2005, had more. Al Chambers (July 23, 1983) and Leon Roberts (April 9, 1978) also had four. It is also the fourth-most RBIs by a Mariner on Opening Day behind Jim Presley (6, 1986), Jim Maler (5, 1982) and Sexson. ... Left-hander Erik Bedard will increase his workload, throwing bullpens on an every-third-day schedule, starting out with a 30-pitch limit. ... Cliff Lee played catch from the bottom of the mound Tuesday and all systems are go for a Friday session off the mound.

[Jim Street <mailto:jim.street@mlb.com>](mailto:jim.street@mlb.com) is a reporter for MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

First full slate pushes season into bloom

Fifteen games make today must-see occasion in baseball

By John Schlegel / MLB.com

04/07/10 12:00 AM ET

The 2010 Major League Baseball season began Sunday night at Fenway Park, and it went into full operation with openers across the country Monday and Tuesday.

But, in a way, the new campaign really kicks into gear today.

The grind of the regular season, the true essence of baseball's marathon that runs from April into autumn, is about to begin in earnest.

In a sense, today is the day the baseball schedule goes into full bloom, the day baseball fully settles into the 30 sets of 162-game slates, for a total of 2,430 games over the course of the championship season.

How do you get to such a big number? With days like today, holding a full boat of 15 Major League games everywhere -- just like every single Friday, Saturday and Sunday during the season. All 15 of today's games are available on MLB.TV, so fans who have an Internet connection and a hankering for baseball can get a full day's worth of action.

This first full slate of 2010 naturally has a special feel to it, since it's Opening Week and all. Every pitcher will be making his first start of the season, and we're talking about some big names.

Some of the offseason's biggest pitching acquisitions will be on the mound, as John Lackey toes the rubber for the Red Sox for the first time, Rich Harden makes his Rangers debut, Jason Marquis does the same with the Nationals and Max Scherzer will make his first start with the Tigers.

Today also marks the return to the field after a day off for some of Monday's biggest Opening Day stars. Albert Pujols, fresh off his four hits and two homers, will lead the Cardinals against the Reds. Jason Heyward, his first-swing homer now part of Atlanta lore, will be back for his second game in right field for the Braves, most likely still in that No. 7 hole against the Cubs. Garrett Jones of the Pirates (two homers), Placido Polanco of the Phillies (grand slam, six RBIs), and Nelson Cruz of the Rangers (three-run homer, game-tying single in the ninth) all will get a chance to repeat their heroics another day.

Thing is, those position players got those first-game jitters out of the way. The starting pitchers who will be on the mound today have yet to do that.

All eyes will be on Lackey when he meets Andy Pettitte in the finale of the same Red Sox-Yankees series at Fenway that started it all off. Lackey, who spent the first eight years of his career with the Angels, takes a 5-7 career mark and 4.66 ERA vs. the Yankees into the duel. For his part, Pettitte knows the rivalry well enough to know it doesn't take the fanfare of Opening Day to make a Yanks-Sox and Pettitte-Lackey matchup special.

"It's just our third game of the season against Boston," Pettitte said. "Really, that's the best way you can explain it. There's just a lot of energy in this ballpark when you play the Red Sox."

There will be energy everywhere, though. That's Opening Week for you. Heck, that's the baseball season for you.

There will be energy, and probably still some cheers echoing through Rangers Ballpark in Arlington from that Opening Day walkoff, when Harden takes on Toronto's Brian Tallet.

And there will be energy for a great duel of youngsters in Kansas City, with Scherzer in his Tigers debut, following the blockbuster three-way trade that brought him from Arizona, against the Royals' former No. 1 overall pick, Luke Hochevar.

This is the year for both to shine. For Hochevar, there's a certain advantage to being in the same clubhouse as a pitcher who took an opportunity to shine and ran with it in 2009: Zack Greinke, the reigning AL Cy Young Award winner.

"That's what we're shooting for," Hochevar said. "Zack set the tone for us last year, and watching him go through it and do what he did, it motivates you to do that. It motivates you to get to where he's at and accomplish the things that he's accomplished."

Another young phenom will make his 2010 debut when 21-year-old Dodgers left-hander Clayton Kershaw meets the Pirates' Ross Ohlendorf, who was brilliant after the All-Star break last year. A former first-round pick will make his National League debut when Ian Kennedy takes the mound for the D-backs against the Padres and Kevin Correia.

Some pitchers primed to take that next step into Cy Young consideration will get their first cracks at 2010 -- guys like Matt Cain of the Giants, who meets Brett Myers in his Astros debut; Jair Jurrjens of the Braves, taking on Ryan Dempster of the Cubs; and Ricky Nolasco of the Marlins, matched with the Mets' John Maine.

Other matchups have that veteran feel to it that brings more of a sense that this could be any given day during the season -- the Rockies' Aaron Cook vs. the Brewers' Doug Davis, the Twins' Carl Pavano vs. the Angels' Ervin Santana and the Phillies' Cole Hamels against the Nationals' Jason Marquis.

It's a day to start proving things. Oakland's Justin Duchscherer will begin to find out if he's ready for a bounce-back year after a rough one on all fronts in '09, and whether Seattle's Ryan Rowland-Smith can keep up what he started the end of last year to become a key cog in the Mariners' rotation.

It's a day full of 2010 debuts that include Adam Wainwright's for the Cardinals; after finishing third in the tight NL Cy Young race a year ago, he faces the Reds' youngster Johnny Cueto. Jake Peavy begins his first full season, both with the White Sox and in the American League, against the Indians' Fausto Carmona.

It's a day when it's really time to get down to the business of baseball, that daily grind that's good until the last drop, all the way into autumn.

Perhaps Matt Garza, who will start the second game of the Rays-Orioles series against Baltimore's Jeremy Guthrie, said it best.

"Right now, I don't care, I could pitch on the moon. I'm just ready to get this thing going."

Amen, Matt. And 15 games in one day ought to get things going just fine.

John Schlegel is a reporter for MLB.com. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.

Last updated April 6, 2010 10:26 p.m. PT

Ellis hits game-winning single

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Mark Ellis hit a game-ending RBI single with two outs in the 10th inning, lifting the Oakland Athletics to a 2-1 victory over the Seattle Mariners on Tuesday night.

Edwar Ramirez (1-0) pitched the 10th to earn his first win since Sept. 3, 2008, when he was with the New York Yankees.

Kanekoa Texeira (0-1) took the loss in his major league debut.

Kevin Kouzmanoff and Kurt Suzuki each singled with one out in the 10th. After Eric Chavez flew out deep to left, Ellis singled into the right-center gap to score pinch-runner Eric Patterson.

A's starter Dallas Braden struck out a career-high 10 in seven innings, giving up a run on four hits and a walk. He retired 15 of 16 during one stretch, and picked off Ichiro Suzuki in the first inning.

Mariners starter Ian Snell lasted six innings, giving up one runs and three hits. He walked two and struck out four.

Franklin Gutierrez, who had two hits, doubled with one out in the fourth, was balked to third and scored on a wild pitch to give the Mariners the early lead.

Kurt Suzuki tied the game in the bottom of the fourth with his first home run of the season, hitting a 1-1 pitch into the left field bleachers.

Snell retired eight of nine batters before Suzuki's home run. Chavez and Ellis followed with singles and Cliff Pennington walked to load the bases. Snell retired Rajai Davis on a comebacker to end the rally and set down the final seven batters he faced.

Texeira had a dramatic ninth inning. With one out in the bottom of the ninth, the right-hander gave up a single to Ellis and Travis Buck's double. Pennington was walked intentionally and Texeira struck out Davis and got Daric Barton to fly out to left field after falling behind in the count.

NOTES: Ichiro Suzuki singled to open the game, extending his hitting streak against the A's to 22 games. ... Snell is 3-1 in his last eight road starts. ... Braden has made 47 career starts and has yet to complete a game, the third-longest streak to start a career with Oakland. ... Ellis has six walk-off hits.

Originally published April 6, 2010 at 9:58 PM | Page modified April 6, 2010 at 10:22 PM

Mariners' 1-2 punch atop batting order still a work in progress

For Chone Figgins batting behind Ichiro, it's a feeling-out process.

Steve Kelley

Seattle Times staff columnist

OAKLAND, Calif. - Ichiro leads. Chone Figgins follows. Ichiro edges off first base. Figgins watches him out of the corner of his eye.

Ichiro measures the pitcher. Figgins measures Ichiro. It's a game within the game. Think of this as baseball's version of "Dancing With The Stars."

Theirs is a hardball pas de deux. Bending at the knees, maybe four strides off first, Ichiro wiggles his fingers. In the batter's box, awaiting the next pitch, Figgins waggles his bat.

Hitting behind a base stealer is one of the most difficult jobs in a difficult game. It is Figgins' new assignment with his new team.

"He's a very intelligent player and he has a great feel for the game," manager Don Wakamatsu said of Figgins. "So I don't think it's a big adjustment."

Still, in this first week of their first regular season together, Figgins still is learning what Ichiro likes to do. Still learning the steps. Still following Ichiro's lead.

It isn't automatic. And it isn't easy.

"We're working on that," Wakamatsu said before Tuesday night's game with the Athletics. "We tried to do the best we could in spring training, but not all the situations are the same.

"As we grow and as those guys get to know each other, we'll get better and better and I think we'll be able to come up with a system where they can read each other a little better."

The Mariners are going to run as if they're playing in Pamplona. Even Tuesday, against Oakland starter Dallas Braden, who virtually is impossible to steal against, they wanted to put the game in motion.

"If we can't steal bases we have to be a little more creative," Wakamatsu said. "Maybe we hit and run more. Maybe we bunt more. We have to look at every option we can."

But you need runners to run. You need hits to hit-and-run. Through their first 19 innings of the season, the Mariners have managed only 11 hits.

Braden struck out 10 in seven innings. Even the most creative teams can only manufacture so many runs.

The only Mariners run came off a double by Franklin Gutierrez, a Braden balk and a wild pitch.

It didn't exactly look like Murderer's Row, but it is becoming Mariners' Row. Through first two games, small ball looks like shrinking ball.

"We've got to manufacture something," Wakamatsu said after the 2-1, 10-inning loss, "and we weren't able to get on base to do that."

Ichiro and Figgins had their chance in the eighth inning. Ichiro worked a two-out walk from reliever Brad Ziegler. Switch-hitter Figgins followed, facing lefty Craig Breslow.

Would Figgins let Ichiro run? Would the Mariners, who had only one runner in scoring position through seven innings, try to get Ichiro to second before letting Figgins swing?

Figgins out-thought the situation. He got impatient. It can happen when a team isn't hitting. He tried to bunt and popped it weakly to Breslow for the final out.

"I do realize," Figgins said, "because I'm a guy who likes to run and Ichiro likes to run, there are situations, when I'm at bat, where I have to be a little more patient and give him a chance to run."

It is to Figgins' credit that he gracefully has made all of the adjustments asked of him.

He was the leadoff hitter last season with the Angels. And he played third. This season, he bats second and plays second.

"You have to be more patient (hitting second), but that's no problem because it's something I've learned over the last four or five years," Figgins said. "I've become more patient. If I get my pitches to hit, I'm going to be ready to hit it.

"But getting him (Ichiro) to second is more important than having him at first, so I'm going to be patient and let him run, but other times I'm going to be ready to bunt, or hit-and-run, or do whatever it takes to move him."

Ichiro and Figgins are a pas de deux in progress.

But they could use a little more help.

Steve Kelley: 206-464-2176 or skelley@seattletimes.com <<mailto:skelley@seattletimes.com>>.

Originally published April 6, 2010 at 10:17 PM | Page modified April 6, 2010 at 10:30 PM

A's top Mariners in 10 innings, 2-1

The mere act of getting a runner to second base proved the biggest challenge Tuesday night for a Mariners squad that struck out 10 times against Oakland Athletics starter Dallas Braden in a 2-1 loss in 10 innings.

By Geoff Baker

Seattle Times staff reporter

OAKLAND, Calif. - Scoring runs wasn't going to be the only problem the Mariners had in taking their first loss of the season.

The mere act of getting a runner to second base proved the biggest challenge Tuesday night for a Mariners squad that struck out 10 times against Oakland Athletics starter Dallas Braden in a 2-1 loss in 10 innings.

On the few occasions the Mariners did reach base, lefty hurler Braden and his formidable pickoff move kept them glued to the bag.

Oakland finally snapped a five-inning scoreless drought by both teams in the 10th, when Mark Ellis hit a walkoff single off Mariners reliever Kanekoa Texeira to bring home pinch-runner Eric Patterson with the winning run.

Rule 5 draft pick Texeira, making his big-league debut, had pitched out of a bases-loaded, one-out jam in the bottom of the ninth. But in his second inning, he saw Kevin Kouzmanoff and Kurt Suzuki notch one-out singles to left.

After a fly out by Eric Chavez, Ellis drove a ball to the gap in right-center to bring Patterson home to end it.

The loss ruined a solid night's work by Mariners right-hander Ian Snell, who allowed only a run over six innings in his season debut. Relievers Shawn Kelley and Mark Lowe worked the seventh and eighth innings, respectively, before Teixeira came on for the ninth.

Snell cruised through the first three innings, then ran into trouble in the fourth when Kurt Suzuki launched a tying solo home run to left field. Oakland followed that with a single lined up the middle by Chavez and a bunt single up the third-base line by Ellis. Third baseman Jose Lopez barehanded the ball but could not complete the play in time.

It appeared Snell would escape trouble when he struck out Travis Buck. But then he walked Cliff Pennington to bring up switch-hitting leadoff man Rajai Davis. Snell got out of it, though, inducing a mild comebacker to the mound and making an easy throw to first in plenty of time for the out.

That was as bad as it got for Snell, who was pulled after six innings with a pitch count at 101.

Snell retired the final seven hitters he faced and finished the night having struck out four and retiring five more on pop flies to the infield or shallow outfield.

It was the kind of performance that normally qualifies for a victory, but the Mariners simply could not get anything going against A's left-hander Braden. The Mariners swung and missed with regularity during his seven innings and only scored because of the pitcher's mistakes.

With one out in the fourth, Franklin Gutierrez doubled to left field and later advance to third base on a balk call when Braden attempted a pickoff.

Braden, who earlier had picked Ichiro off first base with a similar move, may have been a little rattled by the balk call. He promptly unleashed a wild pitch that enabled Gutierrez to scamper home with the game's first run.

Suzuki tied it moments later in the bottom of the inning, and then the two teams settled in for several scoreless frames.

The Mariners were not expected to be an offensive powerhouse when the season began, but the presence of Braden and his deceptive pickoff move limited Seattle even further by negating a large part of their running game. Seattle runners stayed put after the first-inning pickoff of Ichiro, including in the sixth inning when Chone Figgins - a destabilizing basepath force in the season opener - singled to center with only one out.

But instead of trying to steal second, Figgins was kept glued to first by Braden and left stranded there as Casey Kotchman grounded out and Eric Byrnes flied out to left.

The Mariners finally got a chance to do something against someone other than Braden when Ichiro drew a two-out walk against sidearming right-hander Brad Zielgler. But A's manager Bob Geren took no chances and immediately summoned lefty Craig Breslow - more to keep Ichiro contained at first base than because of what Breslow could do facing Figgins.

In the end, Figgins tried to bunt his way on for a hit and wound up popping out to Breslow to end the inning.

Geoff Baker: 206-464-8286 or gbaker@seattletimes.com <<mailto:gbaker@seattletimes.com>>.

For the record

W-L W PCT
1-1 .500

Streak: L1

Home: 0-0

Road: 1-1

vs. AL West: 1-1

vs. L.A.: 0-0

vs. Oakland: 1-1

vs. Texas: 0-0

vs. AL East: 0-0

vs. AL Cent: 0-0

vs. NL: 0-0

vs. LHP: 0-1

vs. RHP: 1-0

Day: 0-0

Night: 1-1

One-run: 0-1

Extra inngs.: 0-1

Sign of times for M's baserunners

M's notes: Suzuki, Figgins figuring out way for Ichiro to signal when he plans to steal

LARRY LARUE; Staff writer

Published: 04/07/10 12:05 am

OAKLAND - Before his second game of the new season Chone Figgins was on pace to steal 324 bases this year - which made him laugh when someone brought it to his attention.

"You have to remember, though, you run with purpose," the Seattle Mariners second baseman said. "And the guy in front of me (Ichiro Suzuki) can run, too. There aren't many teams today that have back-to-back base-stealers in their lineup."

The Ichiro-Figgins tandem remains a work in progress, and some of that work was done Tuesday by manager Don Wakamatsu.

"We want Ichiro and Figgy communicating," Wakamatsu said. "We want Ichiro to have a sign he can flash Figgy at the plate when he's going to run."

Why?

The Mariners point out an opening-night situation that may have cost them a run. Ichiro singled and stole second base. With Figgins at the plate and a 3-1 count, Ichiro took off for third and was called out.

"If Ichiro lets Figgins know he's going, Figgy can square around at the plate and force the third baseman to make a choice - charge the plate or play back," Wakamatsu said. "Most third baseman are going to come in, and if they don't and Figgins gets a strike, he can drop the bunt and Ichiro's at third base, either way."

So the combination at the top is still in transition. Figgins is one happy No. 2 hitter, though, because of the man leading off.

"If Ichiro is on first base and I single, we're almost always going to be first and third base," Figgins said. "If I hit one in the gap, he's going to score and I might be at third base. That's how speed can change games."

Figgins has 282 career stolen bases, including a high of 62 back in 2005. He says until this year, he's never had a perpetual green light.

"Sometimes you need to steal a base, sometimes you take a chance and sometimes you just get a feeling and go," Figgins said. "I always look to run."

“Take a game like (Monday), you love squeaking out a win, stealing one. Those are games your speed can win.”

As for stealing 324 bases, that probably won't happen. For one thing, Wakamatsu said, the Mariners will run less against left-handed pitchers.

“When a lefty is quick to the plate or has a good pickoff move, you don't want to run into outs because you can't get a jump,” he said. “For the most part, we'll have two styles of play - one against left-handed pitchers, another against right-handers.”

Short hops

Left-hander **Erik Bedard** will play catch today, then throw a bullpen session Friday in Texas - and a bullpen session every three days after as he builds up arm strength. ... When Ichiro led off the game opening night, he became eligible for the Hall of Fame by playing 10 years in the majors. Now, to be considered all he need do is retire and wait five years. ... **Rob Johnson** hit two home runs in 258 at-bats last season, but hit one in his first AB on Monday. It's the latest in his career, Johnson said, that he's led his team in homers. ... **Milton Bradley** is the 23rd player to make an opening day start for Seattle in left field. Fifteen of those players started opening day only once at the position.

On tap

Seattle at Oakland today in a 7:07 p.m. game on FSN and 710-AM. Probable starting pitchers: **Ryan Rowland-Smith** vs. **Justin Duchscherer**.

larry.larue@thenewstribune.com <<mailto:larry.larue@thenewstribune.com>>

blog.thenewstribune.com/mariners

Mariners' offense wastes Snell's solid start

Mariners: Five hits and one run doom Seattle to 2-1 loss to Oakland in 10 innings

LARRY LARUE; Staff writer

The Tacoma News Tribune

Published: 04/07/10 12:05 am | Updated: 04/07/10 1:04 am

OAKLAND - The day before the season began, the manager of the Seattle Mariners was talking about manufacturing runs, and explaining why doing so would be necessary.

“We can't afford to sit and wait for three-hit innings,” Don Wakamatsu said.

He wasn't kidding, and the Mariners showed why Tuesday when, in their second game of 2010, they played 10 innings and didn't produce more than one hit in any of them.

The result was a 10-inning, 2-1 loss to Oakland that couldn't be blamed on the Mariners' pitching.

Scoring just one run, the Mariners wasted a fine first start from Ian Snell and shutout pitching from the bullpen until the 10th, when rookie Kanekoa Texeira got two outs before giving up the winning single to Mark Ellis.

Seattle managed five hits - four singles and a Franklin Gutierrez double - didn't steal a base and scored on a wild pitch.

Without help, the M's would've have been shut out.

Following the seven-inning start for Felix Hernandez, Snell went six innings against Oakland, allowed three hits, a pair of walks and a solo home run to Kurt Suzuki. Most nights, that's pitching well enough to win.

This time, it earned him a tie and no-decision.

An emotional pitcher, Snell kept himself in check and got out of trouble after that fourth-inning home run. Singles by Eric Chavez and Ellis and a two-out walk loaded the bases for leadoff hitter Rajai Davis.

Snell jammed Davis with a fastball, fielded a comebacker and got out of the inning.

If the Mariners rotation' was healthy, Snell would likely have been a No. 3 or 4 starter, but with Cliff Lee out and Erik Bedard still rehabbing from surgery, Snell was pushed up in that rotation.

Staying away from his change-up, Snell went with a fastball that topped out at 94 mph and a slider. Oakland's three hits? That home run, a single up the middle and an infield single.

Good, but not enough this night because lefty Dallas Braden had a career game. An off-speed specialist who showed an 88 mph fastball but lived on pitches in the 77 mph range, Braden not only didn't let the Mariners hit him hard, he didn't let them hit him at all.

Nearly half of the 21 outs Braden got in seven innings were strikeouts - a career best 10 of them. The only run Seattle scored, Braden handed them.

That came in the fourth inning, after Franklin Gutierrez doubled with one out. Braden balked, getting Gutierrez to third base. Then, with two outs and Jose Lopez at-bat, Braden bounced a fastball to the backstop - wild pitch - and Gutierrez scored.

There only other real Mariners threat came in the first inning, when Ichiro Suzuki led off with a single. Chone Figgins was at the plate, but before Seattle could put a play on - run, bunt, hit-and-run? - Ichiro was picked off first base. Gutierrez walked, but Milton Bradley struck out.

For seven innings, that was all the Mariners managed against Braden.

Reduced to a battle of the bullpens, neither offense could break through in nine innings, though Oakland came closest. Shawn Kelley and Mark Lowe each worked scoreless innings to get the game to the ninth.

With right-hander Texeira making his major league debut, the Athletics loaded the bases with one out. Texeira struck out Rajai Davis, then fell behind Daric Barton, 2-0, threw a strike and fell behind again, 3-1.

A ball would have forced home the winning run. Catcher Adam Moore trotted to the mound - and so did Lopez and Figgins. After the pep rally, Texeira got Barton to fly out to left field.

Extra innings.

The Mariners went 1-2-3 in their half of the 10th inning, but with one out, Kouzmanoff and Suzuki grounded consecutive singles into left field. Texeira got Eric Chavez on a fly ball, then watched veteran infielder Mark Ellis line a ball up the alley in right center field.

That hit left both the Mariners and Athletics 1-1 with two games remaining in this season-opening series. Tonight, Ryan Rowland-Smith will start and hope to pitch as well as Snell - with a bit more luck behind him.

As for the Seattle offense, it will face Justin Duchsherer, and try to put together a two-hit inning.

blog.thenewstribune.com/mariners

Rainiers ready for last season in old stadium

Baseball: Team unveils uniforms, new players on roster

John McGrath; The Tacoma News Tribune

Published: 04/07/10 4:22 am | Updated: 04/07/10 4:22 am

With an overhaul of Cheney Stadium on the horizon - work on razing and rebuilding the ballpark will begin in September - Tacoma's 51st consecutive season of Triple-A baseball figures to be both a glimpse of the future and a celebration of the past.

As 2010 is looming as a summer unlike anything Tacoma fans can recall, how better to acknowledge the Rainiers' season opener on Thursday than with a party?

“We thought it was a good way to build some excitement,” Rainiers media development manager Ben Spradling said as some 300 season ticket holders gathered Tuesday in a ballroom at the Hotel Murano.

Modifications to the team’s uniform were unveiled. (Teal is out, a road-cap logo with a “T” emerging out of Mount Rainier is in.)

Rainiers manager Daren Brown held a question-and-answer session, noting how the team hopes to build upon its momentum from last year, when Tacoma surged to the playoffs after making up 7 1/2 games in the standings over the final 17 days of the schedule.

Most of all, the reception was an opportunity for fans to wipe the sleep from their eyes after the long, cold, lonely winter, and welcome back baseball.

“It was a big hit,” said emcee Mike Curto, the team’s radio play-by-play broadcaster. “The fans cheered everything. I mean, they even cheered me, and how often does that happen?”

The new ballpark wasn’t the featured theme of the evening, but as artist’s illustrations of the project were on display throughout the ballroom, the notion that the Rainiers are on the cusp of the future was difficult to miss.

“The renovation is great for the city of Tacoma and great for fans,” said starting pitcher Steven Shell. “But our focus has to be one day at a time. We can’t think about the future, and we can’t think about the past.”

Said Brown: “Tacoma will have a lot to be proud of when the new stadium opens, but as the manager, my responsibility won’t change. The task is to get these players in position to contribute to the big league club. There’s some excitement going on in Seattle, and there’s not a guy in our clubhouse who isn’t ready go and help.”

Brown wasn’t inclined to reveal the Rainiers’ starting lineup, as he hasn’t been able to meet individually with every player.

“My philosophy has always been: No surprises,” he said. “I don’t want guys to be surprised by anything we do, and I don’t want to be surprised by anything they do. The first few days will be a feeling-out process. Before long, they’ll be familiar with their roles, and what’s expected of them.”

Some familiar faces on the roster include first baseman/designated hitter Mike Carp, outfielder Michael Saunders, infielders Josh Wilson and Chris Woodward, and pitchers Luke French and Garrett Olson.

Each played a part in the 2009 season with the Mariners. Between them and such other big league veterans as infielders Brad Nelson (Brewers) and Tommy Everidge (A’s), starting pitcher David Pauley (Diamondbacks) and reliever Jesus Colome (Nationals, Brewers) more than half the roster - 14 players - logged some time last season in the big leagues.

In any case, 2010 will represent the last Cheney Stadium experience for both the big league veterans and such newcomers to Triple-A as 22-year-old outfielder Ezequiel Carrera, who won the Texas League batting championship last season while hitting .337 at West Tennessee.

“I’ve always liked Cheney Stadium,” said Shell. “I’ve been around the minor leagues, and when we came here as visitors, we had a good clubhouse attendant and nice, clean locker rooms. We had our own individual shower rooms - that was pretty neat - and the park was always good for pitchers. The ball doesn’t fly out to center, and the grass is thick, so ground balls don’t get through the infield as quick.

“I played at Salt Lake City in a new stadium - a sweet place. Except the ball would shoot off the bat there. So this is real nice for us.”

Cheney Stadium will be all that much nicer in 12 months. Meanwhile, for Shell and his Tacoma Rainiers teammates, the focus isn’t 12 months into the future.

Beginning Thursday, the focus will be on the here, and on the now.

john.mcgrath@thenewstribune.com <<mailto:john.mcgrath@thenewstribune.com>>

Kanekoa Texeira loses in MLB debut

By Star-Bulletin staff

POSTED: 07:07 p.m. HST, Apr 06, 2010

Kanekoa Texeira, a Kamehameha graduate who grew up on Maui, made his major-league debut in the Oakland Athletics' 2-1 win over Seattle last night.

Texeira took the mound for Seattle in the ninth inning of a tie game and allowed the Athletics to load the bases before getting out of the jam by striking out Rajai Davis and forcing Daric Barton to fly out.

Texeira took the ball in the tenth inning and gave up three singles - one of them to fellow Maui native Kurt Suzuki - including the game-winner to right center by Mark Ellis.

Ichiro now eligible for HOF

Posted on April 6, 2010 at 3:22 PM

Jim Street

Mariners.com Blog

Even if Ichiro Suzuki does not play another game in his Major League career, he is now eligible for the Hall of Fame.

The first inning at-bat he had against the Athletics last night - a popup to third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff - gave Ichiro 10 years in the Major Leagues. So whenever he retires, even if it's today, he will have qualified for HOF consideration.

Once a player retires, he must wait five years to be considered for HOF candidacy.

Several HOF voters already are on record of saying Ichiro is on the cusp of being a Hall of Famer, citing his MLB-record nine consecutive seasons with at least 200 hits. He also holds the single season hit record - 262 in 2004.

Ichiro went 1-for-4 in the season opener and scored a run in the ninth inning. It extended his personal hitting streak against Oakland to 21 games, during which he is batting .380 (35-for-92), started on August 24, 2008.

But it is not his longest hitting streak against an opponent.

He had a 26-game streak against the Royals from April 14, 2005 to April 15, 2008 and a 22-gamer against the White Sox from April 27, 2001 to May 11, 2003.

Meanwhile, it is a sunny day at the Oakland Coliseum where the Mariners will try to make it two wins in a row over the Athletics. Right-hander Ian Snell gets the starting nod against Oakland left-hander Dallas Braden.

In other news:

-- Catcher Rob Johnson said the home run he hit last night was the first in his seven-year professional career that he homered on Opening Day/Night. "I lead the team in home runs," he smiled.

-- Johnson said a lot of the low pitches that Felix Hernandez (and other pitchers) threw last night would be called strikes, but plate ump Tim Tschida had a high strike zone.

"Tim was consistent for both teams, but Felix always keeps the ball down. Usually, those pitches are called strikes."

The six walks Hernandez issued tied a single-game career high.

"It's good to get that first game out of the way," Johnson. "He was pretty amped."

-- Jim Street

Rainiers announce Opening Day roster

Posted by Gerry Spratt at April 6, 2010 5:40 p.m.

Seattle PI.com Blog

The Tacoma Rainiers announced their Opening Day roster Tuesday, highlighted by 14 players who saw major league action during the 2009 season.

The Triple-A Rainiers will open their defense of the Pacific Coast League Pacific North Division crown when they meet the Colorado Spring Sky Sox at Cheney Stadium in Tacoma on Thursday at 7 p.m.

The roster is as follows:

PITCHERS (12)

RHP Andy Baldwin
RHP Steve Bray
RHP Jesus Colome
RHP Chad Cordero
LHP Luke French*
RHP Mike Koplove
LHP Garrett Olson*
RHP David Pauley
RHP Yusmeiro Petit
LHP Chris Sneddon
RHP Steven Shell
RHP Levale Speigner

CATCHERS (2)

Eliezer Alfonzo
Josh Bard

INFIELDERS (7)

1B Mike Carp*
2B Travis Denker
1B Tommy Everidge
3B Matt Mangini
1B Brad Nelson
SS Josh Wilson
INF Chris Woodward

OUTFIELDERS (3)

Ezequiel Carrera*
Greg Halman*
Michael Saunders*

* - Mariners 40-man roster

Manager Daren Brown returns for his fourth season at the helm for Tacoma.

M's reportedly still in lead for Dominican pitcher

Posted by Greg Johns at April 6, 2010 3:30 p.m.

Seattle PI.com Blog

While the San Diego Padres recently took a look at Dominican Republic teenager Rafael DePaula, Jorge Arangure of ESPN The Magazine reports that the Mariners are still the favorites to land the hard-throwing teenager.

DePaula, 17, was one of two Dominican prospects suspended by Major League Baseball for a year in 2009 after apparently lying about his age. But he's been eligible to be signed again since Jan. 8 and has worked out for several teams in recent weeks.

Arangure has identified the Mariners and Yankees as frontrunners and he posted an update on his Twitter account Monday that Seattle remains the favorite.

The 6-foot-3 DePaula reportedly throws in the low- to mid-90 mph range and could command \$1.5 million or more as a signing bonus, with some suggesting he could be the equivalent of a first-round draft pick.

It's official: The Groz leaving KJR for 710 ESPN

Posted by Greg Johns at April 6, 2010 11:53 a.m.

Seattle PI.com Blog

As we already talked about over the weekend, long-time KJR broadcaster Dave Grosby is leaving that station to work for 710 ESPN Seattle starting in August.

The move was officially announced Tuesday by 710 ESPN, where "The Groz" will team with Kevin Calabro in his 3-6 p.m. time slot.

"It is rare to find two individuals for one show that have such enormous recognition and stature in the Pacific Northwest sports community," 710 ESPN general manager Dave Pridemore said in a release. "The combined knowledge, experience and local relationships of Calabro and Grosby will no doubt provide more in-depth analysis and unique coverage on the world of sports for our listeners."

Jim Moore, the long-time Seattle Post-Intelligencer columnist, will continue working as Calabro's sidekick until Grosby's arrival.

"I am really excited to be a part of what's going on with 710 ESPN Seattle," Grosby said. "The powerful combination of the Mariners, Seahawks, Kevin Calabro, Brock and Salk, Seattle University and ESPN, defines what a premier sports station looks like and I can't wait to be a part of it."

Grosby has been working in the Seattle sports radio market since 1992 both at KJR and KIRO. He's most recently been splitting duties as co-host of the Groz and Gas Show with Mike Gastineau at KJR-950, while also doing Seattle University basketball play-by-play for 710 ESPN.

April 6, 2010 at 9:56 PM

Athletics 2, Mariners 1, 10 innings: offense goes AWOL and Kanekoa Texeira takes loss in debut

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

Kanekoa Teixeira certainly had his share of adventure in his major league debut. But his second straight inning of flirting with trouble ended in defeat as Mark Ellis drove a ball to the gap in right center for a two-out, walkoff single.

Teixeira had pitched out of a bases-loaded,, one out jam in the ninth, fanning Rajai Davis and getting Daric Barton to pop out after falling behind 3-1 in the count.

The Mariners struggled to generate offense all night, partly because Dallas Braden kept striking them out and also because he limited their fearsome running game.

Let's face it, without Ichiro and Chone Figgins running wild, this offense loses a huge chunk of its already-limited efficiency.

With the lefty Braden and his lethal pickoff move, the M's didn't even bother trying. Ichiro was barely off the bag in the first inning when Braden nabbed him -- though the replay appeared to show another missed call by the umps.

Still, the M's stayed put after that.

And once Ichiro got on against Brad Ziegler in the eighth, the A's brought in another lefty, Craig Breslow, just to keep him from getting a big lead and stealing.

What kept the M's in this game, of course, was some fine pitching by starter Ian Snell, who struck out four, popped out five and had the A's off-balance all night. The only run he gave up over six innings was a solo homer by Kurt Suzuki. That's usually enough to win a game, but not when your offense can't get anyone past first base.

Shawn Kelley got through the seventh with just one walk allowed and Mark Lowe looked filthy in the eighth.

April 6, 2010 at 9:40 PM

Mariners at Oakland Athletics: April 6, 2010 game thread

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

Quite the major league debut for the Big K-Huna. Kanekoa Teixeira finished the ninth inning a lot better than he began it. His first pitch was drilled to center on a line for an out, but that was followed by a single and a double.

An intentional walk loaded the bases, but Teixeira rallied and fanned Rajai Davis. Then, after falling behind 3-1 in the count to Daric Barton, he battled back and induced a flyout to left that sends this one into extra innings.

Teixeira will be out there a while tonight. The M's have David Aardsma and Brandon League in the bullpen still. What they don't have is a lead and this thing could keep going for a while.

9:02 p.m.: Nice recovery in the seventh by Shawn Kelley after that one out walk to Cliff Pennington. Kelley, who replaced Ian Snell to start the frame, wound up getting Rajai Davis on a popout to second and Daric Barton on a harmless flyball to right.

Good news for the M's in that Dallas Braden is finally out of the game. Braden struck out 10 guys and, just as importantly, took Seattle's running game out of the equation. The M's haven't had many baserunners, but stayed glued to their bags after Ichiro was picked off in the first.

You didn't see Chone Figgins go anyplace after that single with one out in the sixth, did you? Not like last night.

Solid outing for Snell, who was pulled at 100 pitches.

8:44 p.m.: Great play at first base by Casey Kotchman, knocked off his feet and nearly into a cartwheel by a Mark Ellis smash. But he recovered and raced to his bag for a third and final out in a 1-2-3 sixth inning tossed by Ian Snell.

We're still tied 1-1 heading to the seventh. The M's have struck out nine times against Dallas Braden so far, stranding Chone Figgins after a one out single the last inning -- one of only three hits by the M's to match the three for Oakland off Snell.

8:16 p.m.: Seattle's lead didn't last long as Ian Snell yielded a home run to left by Kurt Suzuki with one out in the fourth inning that tied the game 1-1. Snell got himself into some trouble after that by giving up a line drive single up the middle to Eric Chavez, then a bunt single up the third base line by Mark Ellis that Jose Lopez barehanded but failed to make a play on.

Snell got a key strikeout on Travis Buck after that, but then walked Cliff Pennington to load the bases for switch-hitter Rajai Davis.

Davis isn't the guy you want to face in a situation like that, but Snell prevailed, getting him to tap a comebacker to the mound for the third and final out.

On to the fifth.

8:05 p.m.: Seattle caught a break in the fourth inning to grab a 1-0 lead. Franklin Gutierrez doubled to left field with one out, but Milton Bradley popped out foul and looked to give Dallas Braden a shot at escaping.

But, on the pivotal play of the frame, Braden was called for a balk that sent Gutierrez to third. Perhaps feeling a bit rattled, Braden then uncorked a wild pitch that enabled Gutierrez to scamper home with the game's first run.

Jose Lopez promptly went down swinging, the seventh K for Braden thus far. So, yes, the M's needed the balk and the wild pitch.

Ian Snell, pitching well, has a lead.

7:54 p.m.: Three innings in and Ian Snell is getting the job done. Snell has kept the Oakland hitters off-balance to the tune of four popouts -- three in the infield and one down the left field line. He's also fanned a pair of hitters. Can't ask for much more. Jose Lopez made him throw some extra pitches in the first inning, but Snell is keeping things manageable for now.

Still scoreless.

7:45 p.m.: Hope Ian Snell didn't go for a drink of water or something between innings because the Mariners barely broke a sweat hitting in that third inning. Dallas Braden has five strikeouts already as we head to the bottom of the third inning still scoreless.

Ichiro saw only one pitch that frame, fouling out down the left field line.

I wish I could tell you the M's have run up Braden's pitch count with all these whiffs, but no. He's only thrown 43 pitches so far.

7:35 p.m.: Well, we had our first official Jose Lopez muff job at third base, but Ian Snell managed to survive it. Snell had gotten the first two hitters out, then appeared to be done with a 1-2-3 first inning as Ryan Sweeney grounded one to third. But Lopez flubbed the ball. Snell then hit Kevin Kouzmanoff with a pitch up and in, but recovered and got Kurt Suzuki on a towering pop-up behind home plate.

Adam Moore had trouble judging the ball and wound up catching both it and the helmet that slipped off his head as he made a last-second reach back and grab.

The Mariners went down in order in the top of the second.

7:13 p.m.: It might not be the greatest night for Seattle to try to put that aggressive running attack to use. Dallas Braden of the Oakland A's has a very good lefty pickoff move and nabbed Ichiro in the first inning after he'd led off with a single.

Chone Figgins struck out from there. Franklin Gutierrez drew a walk and Milton Bradley struck out to end the inning.

Sorry about the late start. The pressbox elevator here at the Coliseum conked out as I was finishing off dinner downstairs. A bunch of us had to go on a tour through the stands, up an additional few floors, then down a stairwell to get back here.

This stadium is a blight on baseball. They keep trying to build a new one elsewhere but those plans continue to fall through. The latest effort is in San Jose, but MLB will have to smooth over a territorial dispute with the San Francisco Giants before that can happen.

April 6, 2010 at 5:53 PM

Expect better communication between Ichiro and Chone Figgins on the basepaths

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

Those close to what's going on behind the scenes with the Mariners this year say the club is already ahead of where it was last season from a unity perspective? Want an example of some of that unity? The team had just begun its pre-game stretch down on the field moments ago when the anthem singer began her warm-up as well. Mike Sweeney ordered the team to stop and stand at attention as she sang.

Part of that comes from bullpen coach John Wetteland, some of it from manager Don Wakamatsu. But the players do stand at attention as the anthem is sung (though some a little more seriously than others, since this is, after all, a practice session). They remain at attention until the honor guard is off the field and Sweeney yells "release!"

Anyhow, that's our up-close video for today.

Now, back to baseball.

One thing that came out of all the running done in last night's game, with the Mariners stealing three bases and getting nabbed twice, is that the team wants improved communication between Ichiro and Chone Figgins. There was one occasion last night when Ichiro was thrown out at third trying to steal on a 3-1 pitch. Had Figgins known he was going, he could have bluffed a bunt and drawn third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff towards the plate. But Figgins had no idea, took ball four, and Kouzmanoff held his ground and was at the bag to apply the tag.

Ichiro appeared to beat it by a hair, but was called out anyway.

Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu said today that the pair have been working to improve communication with each other. That's now going to be stepped up somewhat, likely through visual signals they can give each other. "We're working on it," Wakamatsu said. "I think it takes time for guys to get to know each other. We try to do the best we can in spring training, but not all the situations are the same. So, I think as we grow, I've talked about those guys getting to know each other and I think we'll get better and better and I think we'll come up with a system where they can read each other better and better."

Cliff Lee had his third straight day of playing catch this afternoon and felt nothing in his strained abdomen. Lee remains on schedule to throw a bullpen session this Friday in Texas.

Erik Bedard is playing long toss today, will throw a bullpen session tomorrow and then be on a revolving three-day schedule of bullpens. If those go well for a while, they'll start thinking about sending him out on a rehabilitation assignment.

The bullpen sessions will be for about 30 pitches to start.

The Mariners are making some mechanical adjustments with Bedard in order to keep him a little healthier. It has to do with the turn he has in his delivery. On the positive side, that turn can confuse hitters somewhat, but the downside is that it causes some stress on his shoulder. So, the M's don't want to eliminate the turn entirely, but they're working on tweaking the mechanics involved in it.

Some lineup moves tonight, as Adam Moore does indeed get his first start behind the plate, while Eric Byrnes moves to left field and Milton Bradley to DH with lefty Dallas Braden on the mound.

The lineups:

MARINERS

Ichiro RF
Chone Figgins 2B
Franklin Gutierrez CF
Milton Bradley DH
Jose Lopez 3B
Casey Kotchman 1B
Eric Byrnes LF
Adam Moore C
Jack Wilson SS

RHP Ian Snell

OAKLAND

Rajai Davis CF
Daric Barton 1B
Ryan Sweeney RF
Kevin Kouzmanoff 3B
Kurt Suzuki C
Eric Chavez DH
Mark Ellis 2B
Travis Buck LF
Cliff Pennington SS

LHP Dallas Braden

April 6, 2010 at 10:01 AM

And now comes the rest of the week

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

Despite all the tension in the late going, that actually was a good debut by the Mariners last night. Good because they won the game. When you have Felix Hernandez on the mound, you have to win the game. Especially now that, with Cliff Lee out, the Mariners will, at least in the early going, be crossing their fingers for the rest of the week.

So, that's one down and 161 to go for the M's, who will get a better taste of what's in store for them the rest of this month when Ian Snell takes the mound tonight. In my Talkin' Baseball segment on KJR AM 950 this morning with Mitch Levy, we discussed the possible return of Erik Bedard.

Once again, as I've done for several weeks, I suggested to him that it's a bit unrealistic for anyone to expect Bedard to come riding in on a steed in May to save the season. If anything, Bedard would likely need until well into June to start recovering his previous dominant form. Look at what Ben Sheets did last night. His teammates were hailing his five innings, two earned runs allowed as a positive step in his recovery from arm problems and, to be honest, that might be the best you get from Bedard for a while once he returns from his labrum surgery.

What I suggested to Levy was that a more realistic formula for success for Seattle is to hope Cliff Lee returns by early May and that you get a better-than-expected return from either Snell or Ryan Rowland-Smith. Of the two, the term "better-than-expected" certainly has been used to a lesser degree with Snell.

If anything, the expectations of him have been far greater than the results so far. But if anyone has the reputed upside to cause a surprise, it would indeed be him.

Hard to believe it was only last season that Snell struck out 17 batters in a Class AAA game. Actually, it's not all that hard, since I saw him fan five Texas Rangers hitters in three innings earlier this spring.

Snell certainly has the strikeout potential normally associated with high upside. A few years ago in Pittsburgh, he was a 14-game winner who averaged 8.18 strikeouts per nine innings.

Unfortunately, he also has the mistake-pitch potential that can ruin a lot of outings. That same Texas game, he gave up a home run to Josh Hamilton that I think may have reached the Mexican border by now. He made several more mistake pitches to a minor league Chicago White Sox lineup his final tune-up of spring training.

Snell is said to have apologized to manager Don Wakamatsu after that game.

But the bottom line is, Snell can't keep getting crushed if he's to be an effective contributor to this M's team. Giving up a home run to Hamilton is one thing. Yielding one to a bunch of guys you need to go on Baseball Cube to find anything out about is quite different.

Snell's outings last season took on a familiar pattern after a while. He'd start nibbling and give up a ton of baserunners early and then try to come into the zone and get rocked. That's not going to work in the American League. Won't work much in the NL either and didn't for Snell the past couple of seasons -- though you can get away with stuff more when there's a pitcher and two similar lightweights in every nine-man order.

That 8.18 strikeouts-per-nine-innings figure? It dropped to 5.52 last year. Without that strikeout potential, Snell goes from being a possible legit No. 3 starter in the AL to just another back-end guy on a Mariners team filled with those.

So, the question remains, who will we see tonight?

The Snell who misses bats with pitches? Or, the Snell who misses the strike zone, then misses walls with balls that keep clearing them?

This will be very interesting to watch. Perhaps more interesting than any other start by a Mariners pitcher this week.

Because this team will need some rotation surprises in order to contend. And based on the hype and the more distant history, Snell is the guy who can provide a surprise or two when he's on. But he'll have to flip the switch starting tonight.

April 6, 2010 at 8:13 AM

Join me on KJR AM 950 at 8:30 a.m. for Talkin' Baseball season debut

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

We'll have my Talkin' Baseball segment on KJR AM 950's Mitch in the Morning show coming up at 8:30 a.m. It's our first segment of the 2010 season.

I'm sure we'll have plenty to discuss about last night's game -- Casey Kotchman, Chone Figgins, Felix Hernandez, Sean White, the umpires -- and the team in general, including its payroll, the starting rotation beyond Hernandez, the bullpen and the offense.

Did I forget anything? No doubt some of you will point it out.

On the umpiring from last night, no, it wasn't the greatest debut for them as a crew. From the odd strike zone behind the plate, to a missed call in right field, a questionable out call on Ichiro at third base and another on Milton Bradley at second, the umps picked up right where they left off last post-season.

I've said it before on the live show, but I do think that more advanced pitch/fx technology and those strike zone charts on TV are going to increase calls for umpires to be replaced by computers. Not this year, or next. But in five or 10 years, certainly. Baseball moves at a glacial pace when it comes to change. But there are only so many pitches fans are going to accept being called balls when they are right down the middle, or strikes when they're a half-foot off the plate.

At least one, maybe two of Hernandez's six walks probably should not have happened. In Ichiro's case at third base, they'll usually give that one to the defense, even if Ichiro's foot did appear to make it there ahead of the tag. When the throw beats the runner, it's often an automatic out call. But on the other stuff, like the trapped ball in the outfield, the umpire was not in position to make the call. And the strike zone? It was terrible for both teams, but appeared to hurt Hernandez the most.

April 6, 2010 at 4:52 PM

In praise of Game 2 of the baseball season

Posted by Larry Stone

Seattle Times Blog

Yesterday, I extolled the virtues of Opening Day, which is somewhat akin to a civic holiday. But I've always had a special place in my heart for the second game of the year, too. To me, this is when baseball really gets down to the nitty gritty. Here are some virtues of Game 2*:

*(I promise I won't have 162 of these. I will not have an ode to Game 13, or a paean to the 66th game. This is the finale of this series).

1, The dilettantes and gawkers are gone, and now the hard-core fans take over. In some cities, that will turn out to be about 12,612 in attendance- but those 12,612 are the ones that care the most.

2, The routines that drive baseball really begin on Day 2. Everything is kind of off on Opening Day, because of the pageantry and ceremonies. But all the clubhouse rituals and essential (but often dreary) side work that sustain a team for the long haul start to take hold on the second day.

3, The depth of the rotation begins to reveal itself. Most teams have at least one top-flight pitcher to send to the mound on Opening Day. But on the second day, and third, and fourth, and fifth, we start to see which teams have the pitching depth that will carry them, or the holes that will sink them.

4, The stats slowly begin to take shape and meaning. The "small-sample size" proviso will hold for weeks, of course, but the .800 batting averages and 22.31 ERAs begin the trend to normalcy as the games pile up.

5, We can start to get a better idea of what might be a trend, and what was a one-day aberration. Again, it's still way too early to draw definitive conclusions, but we can get an outline of what sort of team we're dealing with.

6, There's a box score on the second day of the season. One of my great joys in life is poring over the box scores in the newspaper. On-line doesn't count, either. I'm a dinosaur (and yes, a newspaper man), but to me, it's not quite the same box-score experience when you're perusing it electronically. Got to be hunched over a newspaper. With one game already in the book, that game can be relived and analyzed via the agate type while waiting for Game 2.

As I'm going to do right now.

Me & Ichiro & Game 2 in Oakland

Posted By Larry Larue on April 6, 2010 at 7:10 pm

The Tacoma News Tribune Blog

After drawing 30,000-plus to their opening night game, the Oakland Athletics appeared to have barred their gates - the players on the field almost outnumber those in the stands.

Intimate crowd, as they say.

Left-handed pitcher starting for Oakland, Mariners right-handed lineup on the field and Ichiro singled to open the game. Seattle likely won't run as aggressively with a lefty on the hill, but that's just the plan going in. Things change - and Chone Figgins likes to change them.

"I'll run against anyone," he said this afternoon. Believe him.

Anyway, we're underway - Ichiro at first base, no one out.

•Check that. Ichiro picked off first. Figgins down on strikes. Franklin Gutierrez walked to get to Milton Bradley, who struck out. So, one hit, one walk and nothing.

- Two-out error at third base by Jose Lopez, after which Ian Snell hit Kevin Kouzmanoff. Kurt Suzuki popped out. The error cost Snell six pitches.
- Through three innings, Snell has maintained focus in a scoreless game, retiring seven of his last eight batters. He's topped out at 94 mph, hit one batter and walked another.
- Gutierrez doubled with one out in the fourth and, with two outs, Braden balked him to third and wild-pitched him home. That passes as a Mariners rally this year - and it's produced a 1-0 lead.
- Tie game, as Kurt Suzuki homered on a 1-1 pitch in the bottom of the fourth, and Snell is in trouble. After the one-out homer, Eric Chavez singled and Mark Ellis beat out a roller to third. Travis Buck struck out on a 3-2 fastball. Cliff Pennington walked on a 3-2 pitch. Rajai Davis tapped back to the mound - and Snell gets out of it tied, 1-1, leaving the bases loaded with Athletics.
- Braden struck out two more hitters in the fourth and already has a career-high eight strikeouts tonight. He's been Moyer-esque, throwing an 88 mph fastball and then breaking pitches as low as 72 mph. Mariners are not making hard contact.
- Tied after six, this one looks like one to be decided by one bullpen or the other. Oakland has someone warming up behind Braden, no one up in the Seattle pen. Three hits, one run, for each side.
- Lopez singles with one out, takes second on slow chopper by Casey Kotchman. Eric Byrnes - playing in place of Mike Sweeney - flies out to shallow left.
- Shawn Kelley on to pitch the seventh for Seattle. Six good innings from Snell, who threw 100 pitches.
- Ichiro walked with two outs, and to help keep him stuck on first, Oakland went to lefty Craig Breslow. Figgins tried to bunt and popped out.
- Bottom eighth: In to pitch for Seattle, Mark Lowe.
- Top ninth: Closer Andrew Baily on for Oakland. In the Mariners bullpen, Kanekoa Texeira and David Aardsma warm up. If Seattle scores, Aardsma comes in. If not, Texeira will make his major league debut.
- Gutierrez legs out roller to third base. Bradley flied to right field. Lopez flied to center field. Kotchman lined to second base. Texeira coming in to pitch bottom of the ninth.
- One out singlred by Ellis followed by a shattered-bat double from Buck that blooped over third base. Wakamatsu went to the mound and brought the entire infield in to talk. With No. 9 hitter Cliff Pennington up, the infield played in with the outfielders shallow, and Pennington walked to load the bases. Davis struck out out. Daric Barton flied out. Extra innings.
- Bottom 10: Back-to-back one out singles brought Chavez to the plate. He flied out on a 2-2 Texeira fastball. Ellis singled to right-center field, driving in the winner. Oakland 2, Seattle 1.

A lineup - and Ichiro and Figgy need work

Posted By Larry Larue on April 6, 2010 at 4:47 pm

The Tacoma News Tribune Blog

One game into the new season, Chone Figgins is on pace to steal 324 bases, Ichiro Suzuki 162 - and they need to fix a few things.

No. 1, Ichiro needs to let Figgins know when he's about to take off - and opening night was the perfect example.

Ichiro stole second base and, with Figgins at the plate and a 3-1 count, Ichiro lit out for third, where he was called out on a close play. Would it have made any difference if Figgy knew Ichiro was going?

"If Ichiro lets Figgins know, Figgins can square around at the plate and force the third baseman to make a choice - charge the plate or play back," manager Don Wakamatsu said. "Most third baseman are going to come in, and if they don't and Figgins gets a strike, he can drop the bunt and Ichiro's at third base, either way."

It's one of those works-in-progress for Seattle.

"You just don't see many teams with back-to-back base-stealers," Figgins said. "Ichiro and I are still getting used to one another, but having us at the top of the lineup makes a huge difference."

"If he's on first base and I single, we're almost always going to be first-and-third base. If I hit one in the gap, he's going to score and I might be at third base. That's how speed can change games."

Figure the stolen base pace will drop off just a bit. But figure, too, that Ichiro and Figgins will work out signs between the two of them that will allow Figgins to help when Ichiro is running. It's a combination that figures to improve as the season goes along.

And now, a lineup vs. lefty Dallas Braden:

- Ichiro, RF
- Chone Figgins, 2B
- Franklin Gutierrez, CF
- Milton Bradley, DH
- Jose Lopez, 3B
- Casey Kotchman, 1B
- Eric Byrnes, LF
- Adam Moore, C
- Jack Wilson, SS
- Ian Snell, P

That's one - and now Seattle faces a test

Posted By Larry Larue on April 6, 2010 at 3:37 pm

The Tacoma News Tribune Blog

Courtesy of the Albuquerque Isotopes, power has been restored to the LaRue computer and a battery that was down to 3%. Any lower and mouth-to-mouth would have been necessary.

A day after watching Felix Hernandez and his teammates win their opener here in Oakland, the impression was that their 5-3 victory represented the kind of game they're going to have to win.

They didn't hit particularly well, but they ran the bases with abandon and had one middle-of-the-line hitter - this time, Casey Kotchman - deliver. The bullpen was dominant, the defense about as good as a pitching staff could ask for with four double plays.

The concern, of course, is that if the Mariners have to do that many things well to win a Felix start, what can they expect on nights when four other starters are working?

Just play baseball. The Mariners will hit more than they did Monday night at times, and spread their production around. The top three men in the lineup - Ichiro, Chone Figgins and Kotchman - had marvelous games. Tonight, it might be Jose Lopez or Franklin Gutierrez

If you're looking for positives, consider this: Ken Griffey Jr. doubled against a left-handed pitcher, Rob Johnson homered in his first at-bat - against Ben Sheets! - and Lopez at third base and Figgins at second was all the Mariners could have hoped.

Concerns? Milton Bradley was so frustrated with a ninth-inning strike out he shattered his bat pounding it on home plate. Felix allowed only three hits in 6 2/3 innings but walked six.

All in all, opening night was about winning through aggression on the bases, pitching and defense - precisely the formula Seattle talked about all spring.

With Cliff Lee and Erik Bedard hovering about a month out, the Mariners are going to have to steal wins like that one throughout April. Scouts are going to suggest pitch outs with Ichiro and Figgins aboard, more slide-stepping on the mound to slow them down.

It's a tough way to win games, but the Mariners have little choice. Their offense is what it is and they have to maximize it to win. Their bullpen remains their strength, their defense looks solid.

The issue remains that rotation. Can Ian Snell, Ryan Rowland-Smith, Doug Fister and Jason Vargas hold teams like Texas, Detroit, Baltimore and Chicago in check this month?

That's the test that begins tonight, with Snell vs. Oakland

Rainiers release 2010 opening day roster

Posted By Ryan Divish on April 6, 2010 at 3:27 pm

The Tacoma News Tribune Blog

The Rainiers open the season on Thursday against the Colorado Spring Sky Sox at Cheney Stadium. They'll be hosting a media and fan event today, which several of us are attending.

They've released their opening day roster, perhaps the biggest surprise is outfielder Greg Halman moving up to Triple A after having an interesting year at Double A West Tenn last season. There's little question to Halman's talent. He has power - hitting 25 home runs last season. But he hit just .209 and struck out 191 times in 591 plate appearances.

One of the hopes in calling Halman up, albeit a little prematurely, is to work with Rainiers hitting Alonzo Powell, who has drawn solid reviews from other players.

I talked with Daren Brown the other day and the starting rotation isn't quite set. He had his first four starters as right-hander David Pauley will get the opening day start.

The Rainiers only have three outfielders on the roster, but Brown said Brad Nelson could play right field if necessary.

PITCHERS

RHP Andy Baldwin

RHP Steve Bray

RHP Jesus Colome

RHP Chad Cordero

LHP Luke French

RHP Mike Koplove

LHP Garrett Olson

RHP David Pauley

RHP Yusmeiro Petit

LHP Chris Seddon

RHP Steven Shell

RHP Levale Speigner

CATCHERS

Eliezer Alfonzo

Josh Bard

INFIELDERS

Mike Carp
Travis Denker
Tommy Everidge
Matt Mangini
Brad Nelson
Josh Wilson
Chris Woodward

OUTFIELDERS

Ezequiel Carrera
Greg Halman
Michael Saunders

April 6, 2010

Good News Just Continues

710 ESPN Seattle's Shannon Drayer

MyNorthwest.com Blog

Continued good news on the starting pitching front...Erik Bedard will throw a bullpen tomorrow and get on a schedule of throwing pens every three days. He is throwing all of his pitches and looks good. Now they need to start building the pitch count up and as I have been saying for the past week, get that surgically repaired shoulder used to the throwing motion again.

While we were at the game tonight the A's had a sponsored medical report on the big screen. Under the sponsor they listed the injured A's and Mariners and their expected return dates. For Bedard they said he was out with the torn labrum and was expected to return mid July. They might want to update that.

More good news on the Cliff Lee front as well. He threw in the bullpen, from in front of the mound today. At the end of the throwing session he got up on the mound and did some dry work. Some of you asked on Twitter (and if you don't follow me you can if you like at @shannondrayer) just what that meant. Basically it is pitching without the ball. Going through the motion so to speak. Cliff did this for about two minutes while I was watching. It didn't look like he was quite at full speed but he was actually on the mound for the first time.

I was the only member of the media on the field when he did it and as he walked by with trainer Rick Griffin I asked if he was having his daily press conference. He has answered questions every time he has thrown a ball and done so graciously. He laughed. "Same report as last time. Everything is good," he said. That's all I need to hear.

To answer a question from JakeSuds...I asked RRS about the Japanese writing on his glove. It is indeed his name which a member of one of the Japanese television crews confirmed. Turns out RRS's glove contract is with a Japanese glove company. They asked if he would mind having his name embroidered in Japanese on it and he said why not?

To Seattle Dad and gomairners, go was right. Kotch was looking for a pie. He is not the most talkative Mariner but he certainly was distracted. I interviewed him for Beyond the Baselines today and will have the interview up on the site later tonight.

Last updated April 6, 2010 10:10 p.m. PT

Twins beat Angels 5-3 with three HRs

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ANAHEIM, Calif. -- Joe Mauer, Justin Morneau and J.J. Hardy each homered off Joe Saunders, leading the Minnesota Twins over the Los Angeles Angels 5-3 on Tuesday night.

Nick Blackburn (1-0) returned to the site of his first big league start and allowed three runs and eight hits over 6 2-3 innings with four walks and four strikeouts. Blackburn threw 103 pitches, 69 for strikes.

Jon Rauch made his season debut with a perfect ninth inning to earn his first AL save. The 6-foot-11 right-hander was assigned the closer's role last Friday by manager Ron Gardenhire after four-time All-Star Joe Nathan underwent season-ending Tommy John surgery in March.

Rauch had a career-high 17 saves in 2008 for Washington. But he will have a tough job to fill: Nathan averaged 41 saves over the previous six seasons and finished second in the majors last year with 47 - one fewer than the Angels' Brian Fuentes.

Saunders (0-1) gave up five runs and nine hits over five innings and struck out four. The left-hander, who went 7-0 in his final eight regular-season starts last year, surrendered three or more homers in a game for the sixth time in his career.

Mauer, who hit a career-high 26 home runs last season en route to his third AL batting title, cleared the center field fence on a 1-1 pitch after Denard Span drew a leadoff walk and was erased on an attempted sacrifice by Orlando Hudson. The Twins then loaded the bases and Delmon Young made it 3-0 with a sacrifice fly.

Morneau led off the third with a towering drive to right field to make it 4-0. The Angels got on the board in the bottom half with Torii Hunter's RBI single, but Hardy - obtained from Milwaukee for outfielder Carlos Gomez in November - got that run back in the fourth with a drive into the newly installed magnolia trees behind the center field fence.

Hunter hit a two-run homer in the bottom of the fifth to bring the Angels to 5-3 and added a double that chased Blackburn. The former Twins outfielder was 3 for 4 after coming in 8 for 44 lifetime against Minnesota.

The crowd of 45,000 set a Guinness Book record for "the largest gathering of people wearing fleece blankets of one color in one place.

The red "blankies" were inscribed with Hideki Matsui's name and uniform No. 55. A Guinness World Records adjudicator was on hand to officially certify the new record, which shattered the previous mark of 17,758 fans that was just set on March 5 by the NBA's Cleveland Cavaliers.

NOTES: A moment of silence was observed in memory of Bob Clear, the Angels' bullpen coach during their 1979, 1982 and 1986 AL West championship seasons, who died Tuesday at age 82. ... Gardenhire left the ballpark before the game ended because of flulike symptoms, and was replaced by third base coach Scott Ullger. ... Mauer and Morneau homered in the same game six times last season - all in May - and the Twins were 4-2 on those occasions. ... Mauer was hitless in his first eight career at-bats against Saunders before the home run. ... Bert Blyleven, in his 15th season as a TV analyst for the Twins, turned 59 years old Tuesday. He is one of three pitchers in history to win a big league game before his 20th birthday and after his 40th birthday, along with Mike Morgan and Herb Pennock. Anaheim was the site of Blyleven's only no-hitter, a 6-0 victory over the Angels in 1977 while pitching for the Texas Rangers. ... Hunter is one of four players who spent at least 10 seasons with the Twins and then went straight to the Angels. The others were Bert Blyleven (trade) Rod Carew (trade) and Gary Gaetti (free agency).

Last updated April 6, 2010 8:24 p.m. PT

Scutaro error leads to key run in Yanks' 6-4 win

By HOWARD ULMAN
AP SPORTS WRITER

BOSTON -- Hideki Okajima walked Nick Johnson to score the tiebreaking run after a costly error by shortstop Marco Scutaro loaded the bases, and the New York Yankees beat the Boston Red Sox 6-4 Tuesday night.

Scutaro, part of Boston's offseason emphasis on improving its run prevention, fielded Derek Jeter's routine grounder with two outs in the eighth. But his throw went in the dirt and off first baseman Kevin Youkilis' glove. Then Okajima (1-1) walked Johnson, scoring Jorge Posada and making the score 5-4.

Robinson Cano added his first homer of the year in the ninth.

Alfredo Aceves (1-0) pitched two hitless innings and Mariano Rivera got his first save of the year and 527th of his career, most in AL history.

Rivera's appearance earned the Yankees a unique distinction - the only team in the history of major league baseball, the NFL, NBA and NHL with three players who played together in 16 consecutive seasons. Posada and Derek Jeter are the others.

Posada began the eighth with a ground-rule double that tailed away from right fielder J.D. Drew. But he stayed at second when Brett Gardner hit a single to short left field with one out. Curtis Granderson flied out. Then Jeter hit a grounder to Scutaro, one of three free agents signed by Boston to improve its defense.

But his throw bounced just in front of Youkilis, who snared it out of the air after Jeter had crossed first base.

Okajima, the winner of Boston's 9-7 opening night victory Sunday over New York, then walked Johnson on a 3-1 count. Scott Atchison relieved Okajima and retired Mark Teixeira on a fly out.

Starters A.J. Burnett for New York and Jon Lester for Boston each had rough outings, allowing four runs in five innings.

For Burnett, it was more trouble at Fenway Park where he went 0-2 with an 8.85 ERA in four starts last year. The first time he pitched there in 2009, he allowed eight runs in five innings in Boston's 16-11 win.

Lester pitched Boston's second game for the third straight year and struggled each time. He lost 5-1 to Oakland in 2008 in Tokyo and 7-2 to Tampa Bay last year. He gave up a combined nine runs in nine innings. In fact, he's had a tough time in March and April throughout his career, going 2-4 with a 4.78 ERA in 12 starts before Tuesday.

Boston took a 1-0 lead in the first after Jacoby Ellsbury led off with a single, stole second and continued to third when Posada's throw went into center field for an error. Youkilis, who drove in two runs in Boston's 9-7 opening night win on Sunday, then hit a sacrifice fly.

New York tied it in the second on a single by Cano, a walk to Posada and an RBI double by Nick Swisher.

Victor Martinez gave the Red Sox a 3-1 lead in the third with his first homer of the year, a two-run shot after Ellsbury's double.

Then the Yankees jumped in front 4-3 with three runs in the fifth after loading the bases with no outs when Granderson and Jeter singled and Johnson was hit by a pitch. The runs scored when Teixeira grounded into a forceout at second, Alex Rodriguez doubled and Cano hit a sacrifice fly.

NOTES: Righty batter Marcus Thames started in left field for New York in place of lefty Gardner because left-hander Lester started for Boston. Gardner pinch hit for Thames in the sixth when right-hander Manny Delcarmen replaced Lester. ... Red Sox No. 5 starter Clay Buchholz plans to throw a simulated game Wednesday. With two days off in the first five of the season, Boston won't use him until Sunday in Kansas City. ... The ceremonial first pitch was thrown by Hannah Kearney of Norwich, Vt., who got the first gold medal for the United States at the Vancouver Olympics by winning the women's moguls. During the opening ceremonies, she wore a Jacoby Ellsbury T-shirt under her Olympic uniform. Ellsbury caught her pitch Tuesday.

Last updated April 6, 2010 8:12 p.m. PT

Crawford's ninth-inning hit beats Orioles 4-3

By FRED GOODALL
AP BASEBALL WRITER

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. -- Carl Crawford drove in two runs with a bases-loaded double in the ninth inning to give the Tampa Bay Rays a 4-3 season-opening victory over the Baltimore Orioles on Tuesday night.

Adam Jones, Luke Scott and Matt Wieters homered for the Orioles, who were unable to put the game away because of a lack of timely hitting with runners in scoring position.

Evan Longoria homered in the sixth for the Rays, who loaded the bases in the ninth against Baltimore's new closer, Michael Gonzalez, with a single, double and an intentional walk. Crawford lined a 1-0 pitch into right field, driving in the winning runs before a sellout crowd of 36,973 at Tropicana Field.

The winning hit initially was scored a single. It was later changed to a double.

Rafael Soriano (1-0) got the win, despite struggling to get through the top of the ninth for Tampa Bay.

Orioles starter Kevin Millwood allowed two runs and nine hits in five-plus innings. The right-hander was two outs away from getting the win before Gonzalez (0-1) gave up a one-out single to Rodriguez to start the winning rally.

Jones, Scott and Wieters hit solo homers off James Shields. Baltimore's bullpen pitched three scoreless innings to get the game into the ninth.

Millwood, who walked one and struck out five, is one of four major additions the Orioles made during the offseason, along with third baseman Miguel Tejada, first baseman Garrett Atkins and Gonzalez.

At 28, Shields is the oldest member of a starting rotation whose average age of 26.19 years is the second youngest in the majors leagues. He's been tough on the Orioles during his career, winning six of eight decisions against them.

Jones homered in the third, Scott made it 2-0 in the fourth and Wieters put Baltimore up 3-1 in the sixth.

Longoria's homer, a 473-foot shot to left that landed in the first row of the upper deck of the domed stadium, trimmed Millwood's lead to 3-2. Orioles manager Dave Trembley turned to his bullpen after Carlos Pena layed down a bunt single and B.J. Upton lined a hit to left to give Rays runners at first and second with no outs.

Baltimore escaped the jam when reliever Matt Albers struck out Rodriguez after getting Pat Burrell to ground into a double play.

The Orioles finished with seven extra-base hits - three homers and four doubles - but wasted several opportunities to break the game open. They stranded seven baserunners while going 0 for 8 with men in scoring position against Shields, who allowed three runs and nine hits in six-plus innings.

The Rays starter walked two and struck out six.

Brian Roberts made his seventh straight opening day start for Baltimore, despite being slowed much of spring training by a herniated disk in his back. He went 0 for 5.

Tejada, beginning a second stint with Baltimore, also went 0 for 5 after finishing last season on a 21-game hitting streak with Houston. He lined to left with the bases loaded in the ninth, when the Orioles squandered their last chance to build on their lead.

Baltimore finished 1 for 12 with runners in scoring position. That hit, Cesar Izturis' ninth-inning infield single, did not drive in a run.

NOTES: The Orioles opened the season on the road for just the fourth time in the past 30 years. ... Admiral Eric Thor Olson, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, threw out the ceremonial first pitch. ... The last three times Baltimore has had multiple homers on opening day, it was against Tampa Bay. They hit two against the Rays in 1999 and four in 2006. ... Shields made his third consecutive opening day start for Tampa Bay, a franchise record.

Last updated April 6, 2010 3:22 p.m. PT

APNewsBreak: Baseball players mull grievance

By RONALD BLUM
AP SPORTS WRITER

NEW YORK -- Baseball players may file a collusion grievance charging owners with conspiring against free agents last winter.

"We have concerns about the operation of the post-2009 free agent market," new union head Michael Weiner said Tuesday in a telephone interview with The Associated Press. "We have been investigating that market. Our investigation is far along but not yet complete."

The sides reached a standstill agreement last year giving the union additional time to decide whether to proceed with a grievance against teams alleging misconduct after the 2008 season.

Management denies any violation of the collective bargaining agreement, which states clubs may not act in concert with respect to free agents.

"The free-agent market operated in a manner that was completely consistent with the requirements of the basic agreement," said Rob Manfred, executive vice president of labor relations in the commissioner's office. "I feel confident that the MLBPA will come to the same conclusion when they complete their investigation."

Agents for players, without going into specifics, have claimed they received multiple similar offers for free-agent clients and have pushed the union to contest the practice.

The union filed collusion grievances following the 1985, 1986 and 1987 seasons and, after arbitrators ruled in the union's favor, management agreed to a \$280 million settlement. A triple-damages provision was inserted into the sport's labor contract in 1990.

Weiner took over as union head from Donald Fehr in December.

"We will determine in the coming weeks what our response to the market will be, whether that response will be a legal one or whether our response will be at the bargaining table," Weiner said. "We do have concerns and in one fashion or another we will respond."

Last updated April 6, 2010 2:38 p.m. PT

Aaron says Heyward can help 'what ails baseball'

By CHARLES ODUM
AP SPORTS WRITER

ATLANTA -- Jason Heyward's debut has Hank Aaron convinced that the rookie can stir up more excitement about baseball in the black community.

The legendary Atlanta Braves slugger told The Associated Press Tuesday that Heyward, who is black, "can mean an awful lot to what ails baseball."

Aaron shares a growing concern that there are too few African-American players in the game. It's a concern he expressed again during spring training. He says it's a common problem that baseball has been slow to address.

Aaron isn't wasting anytime promoting the Braves' newest African-American star.

After Heyward's debut on Monday - which included a three-run homer on his first swing - the Hall of Famer was even more optimistic that the 20-year-old rookie can make a difference.

"You don't know how excited I was, and not only me," Aaron said. "I was talking to (civil rights pioneer and former Atlanta mayor) Andrew Young about the same thing, and he wants me to bring him out there to meet Heyward. It's beginning to move through the black area. People are getting excited."

Aaron, 76, says the buzz makes him feel good.

"He can certainly bring the excitement back, not only for Atlanta but also for African-American players," Aaron said. "We do need to have many, many more Jason Heywards."

Heyward has shown interest in promoting baseball. He is associated with a program co-sponsored by the Braves which offers free instruction to Atlanta inner-city middle school and high school kids. The program called L.E.A.D. - Launch, Explore, Advise and Direct - aims to help players earn college scholarships through baseball.

Today, the NBA attracts more black athletes than Major League Baseball. And though Heyward - 6-foot-5, 240 pounds - chose baseball, Aaron said his first impression of him was that he "looked more like a basketball player."

"But he carries it well," Aaron said. "He moves around well. He can glide along and catches a lot of fly balls and he runs the bases very well."

Aaron said it's a bonus that Heyward is from Henry County, about 30 miles south of Atlanta. "He can be the kind of player that everybody dreams about, and coming from Georgia certainly has its advantages."

A fact that's not lost on the Braves.

Atlanta set up the Heyward era with a bookend pairing of the its first and newest right fielders. Aaron, who played right field in the team's 1966 inaugural season in Atlanta, threw the ceremonial first pitch to Heyward before Monday's game.

"He said have fun and told me I'm ready to do this," Heyward said. "He said go out there and enjoy it."

The largest crowd to ever attend a day game in Atlanta was with Heyward from the start. He received a loud ovation from the 53,081 fans during pregame introductions and then was serenaded by "Let's go, Hey-ward!" chants in his memorable first at-bat.

Aaron said he was impressed with the discipline Heyward showed, taking two balls before his first swing against Chicago Cubs ace Carlos Zambrano.

"They were not too that far away from being called strikes," Aaron said. "He's a rookie and you've got a veteran out there pitching. Seems to me like being a rookie you'd go up there swinging the bat.

"But he knew exactly what he wanted to do and he got his pitch and he hit it out of the ballpark. That was a demonstration to me that this kid had everything under control."

The left-handed hitting Heyward sent a Zambrano fastball on a line behind the 390-foot mark on the right-field wall. The roar from the crowd shook Turner Field.

"I think I'll remember that the most, how loud it was," Heyward said.

Fans will get to see what Heyward can do for an encore when the Braves and Cubs resume their three-game series on Wednesday.

Atlanta manager Bobby Cox doesn't know what exactly to expect, other than it will be good.

"He'll have his struggles, probably, like any other 20-year-old that's in the big leagues, but he's a very talented kid," Cox said. "And when he's not hitting, he's going to help us in the outfield. He's a very gifted athlete."

Last updated April 6, 2010 9:11 p.m. PT

Wolf wins in debut, Brewers top Rockies

By COLIN FLY

AP SPORTS WRITER

MILWAUKEE -- Randy Wolf's debut for the Brewers was a success, Casey McGehee and Rickie Weeks homered and Milwaukee beat the Colorado Rockies 7-5 on Tuesday night.

Wolf (1-0) struck out eight in 6 2-3 innings in his first start since signing a \$29.75 million, three-year contract in the offseason to bolster Milwaukee's starting staff.

McGehee and Weeks did their part to help. McGehee hit a three-run homer in the first and Weeks added a solo shot off Rockies starter Greg Smith (0-1) in the fifth.

Trevor Hoffman gave up a run in a rocky ninth for his 592nd career save.

Milwaukee snapped a seven-game losing streak to the Rockies. Colorado's Ian Stewart hit his second homer in as many days and doubled and tripled.

Wolf received raucous cheers each time he struck out a batter and a standing ovation when he left, a sharp difference from last year when most Milwaukee fans were howling in disgust at a rotation that compiled a majors-worst 5.37 ERA.

Wolf left after giving up a run-scoring fielder's choice to Carlos Gonzalez in the seventh that made it 5-4 and a single to Dexter Fowler to put men on first and second with two outs.

Reliever Mitch Stetter retired Todd Helton on a popup to end the threat and LaTroy Hawkins pitched a perfect eighth, but Hoffman ran into trouble.

After Milwaukee scored two insurance runs in the bottom of the eighth, Hoffman allowed a leadoff triple to Stewart, who scored on Seth Smith's groundout. Gonzalez hit a flare single with two outs to bring up the tying run in pinch hitter Jason Giambi, who struck out on a 73 mph changeup.

Helton drove in Colorado's first run in the first, but the Brewers answered in the bottom of the inning with McGehee's two-out, opposite field homer that made it 3-1.

Prince Fielder finished 2 for 2, scored three times and drove in one of the insurance runs in the eighth. He was in stitches, too, at his own expense.

In the fourth, Fielder and McGehee were at the corners with no outs when Gregg Zaun hit into a double play. Fielder should've scored easily, but he tripped, struggled to regain his balance and held onto his helmet awkwardly as he got back on his feet to sprint home and make it 4-2.

Weeks' solo shot in the fifth made it 5-3 and was his first homer since season-ending surgery on his left wrist last year.

Stewart, who celebrated his 25th birthday on Monday and got his wish when Duke won the national championship, hit a deep home run over the Brewers bullpen in left-center field in the second inning to cut Milwaukee's lead to 3-2.

The Rockies got another run in the fifth off a groundout by Gonzalez to cut Milwaukee's lead to 4-3, but they never tied it for Greg Smith, who worked five innings in his first start in the majors since 2008 in place of Jeff Francis (shoulder).

NOTES: Francis had a throwing session on the side in Milwaukee before the game and reported no pain. He's scheduled to throw again Wednesday. ... Rockies closer Huston Street (right shoulder) received an evaluation from Dr. James Andrews that revealed no structural damage. The Rockies expect Street to start a program to strengthen his shoulder and begin throwing with a return sometime in May.

Last updated April 6, 2010 8:05 p.m. PT

Giants blank Astros 3-0

By KRISTIE RIEKEN
AP SPORTS WRITER

HOUSTON -- Barry Zito pitched three-hit ball over six innings and four relievers finished up the San Francisco Giants' 3-0 victory over the Houston Astros on Tuesday night.

Zito (1-0) struck out five before he was replaced by Waldis Joaquin. Joaquin, Dan Runzler, Sergio Romo and closer Brian Wilson combined for one hit in the last three innings. Wilson earned his second save.

Giants newcomer Aubrey Huff had two hits and drove in a run in a game that was scoreless until the sixth.

It was the second tough offensive night for a Houston team playing without star Lance Berkman. The loss followed Monday's 5-2 season-opening defeat, where the Astros were shut out for eight innings.

Astros starter Wandy Rodriguez (0-1) did better than he did this spring when he posted a 12.10 ERA, but took the loss after allowing seven hits and three runs in six innings. He struck out four and walked four.

Neither team scored until Huff's RBI single that came after consecutive walks in the sixth inning. San Francisco scored again when Pablo Sandoval narrowly evaded a tag from catcher Humberto Quintero after Hunter Pence caught a long fly ball and threw home. The third run of the inning came on an RBI single to right field by Juan Uribe. Rodriguez walked Andres Torres before striking out Zito to end the inning.

Houston rookie Tommy Manzella got plunked in the left forearm by a pitch by Joaquin with two outs in the seventh inning. Manzella was shaken up, but took his base after talking to manager Brad Mills and a trainer for a bit. Joaquin was replaced by Runzler for the next batter and he retired Geoff Blum to end the inning.

Jeff Keppinger got his second double of the game with one out in the sixth when his fly ball looked to have bounced off the yellow line on the top of the wall in front of the Crawford Boxes in left field. The umpires reviewed the play, but the ruling on the field stood. The Astros came away empty-handed when Zito retired Pence and Carlos Lee to end the inning.

Rodriguez allowed a single to start the fourth inning before Sandoval grounded into a double play. Huff and Mark DeRosa each singled after that before Pence caught a fly ball from Bengie Molina to end the inning. Rodriguez also got helped out by a double play that ended the second inning.

The Astros had runners at first and second with two outs in the third inning after a single by Rodriguez and a walk by Keppinger, but Zito struck out Pence to end the inning. He then retired the next seven batters.

There was a short delay in the second inning after Molina accidentally hit Quintero on the back of his shoulder with his bat during a strikeout. Quintero got hit as he was trying to throw the ball to second base and quickly fell to the ground clutching his left shoulder. He got up and talked to a Houston trainer for a couple of minutes before remaining in the game.

NOTES: Brandon Lyon pitched a scoreless eighth in his debut with the Astros. ... Former President George H.W. Bush sat on the front row behind home plate near Astros owner Drayton McLane.