

## A's News Clips, Thursday, April 8, 2010

### A's celebrate win over Milton Bradley, Mariners on Kurt Suzuki's RBI double in the ninth

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

A's fans gave Milton Bradley an earful on Monday and Tuesday at the Oakland Coliseum.

They had more fodder after Wednesday's game-ending play that gave the A's a 6-5 victory over the Seattle Mariners.

With a runner on first in the bottom of the ninth, Kurt Suzuki lofted a deep fly to left field off Seattle reliever Mark Lowe. Bradley, playing left, reached up at the base of the wall and had a play. But the ball appeared to just graze his glove and ricochet off the wall.

Kevin Kouzmanoff motored around from first with the game-winning run, handing the A's their second walk-off victory in two nights.

"Once it came off the bat, I thought it had a chance to get out," Suzuki said. "I sort of paused at first base. I saw it bounce off the scoreboard and Kouzmanoff was rounding third base."

Bradley, the former Athletic who's attracted controversy at every stop in his career, has received regular boos throughout this series.

"Make your own assessment," Bradley told reporters when asked about the play.

In Bradley's defense, Suzuki's fly ball hardly was routine. In fact, it was ruled a double and game-winning RBI.

The play ended yet another nail-biter between these teams in a season-opening four-game series. The first three games all have been tied going into the ninth inning.

By the time the ninth rolled around Wednesday, Justin Duchscherer's first start in more than 19 months seemed as if it took place days ago.

The A's right-hander, who missed last season because of elbow surgery and a bout with clinical depression, went 52/3 innings and allowed five runs on seven hits.

His night got off to a rocky start — courtesy of Bradley. Bradley crushed a 2-1 pitch deep over the right-field wall for a two-run homer in the top of the first. Duchscherer settled in and retired 10 of the next 11 hitters.

The A's would come back to take the lead against Mariners lefty Ryan Rowland-Smith, sparked by leadoff man Rajai Davis. He manufactured a run in the first, singling, stealing second and going to third on catcher Rob Johnson's errant throw. He came home on Ryan Sweeney's sacrifice fly.

Leading off the third, Davis lined a homer over the left field wall to tie it 2-2.

Daric Barton began the fourth with a single. Travis Buck followed with a one-out double to the right-field corner, and Barton came around to score when Ichiro Suzuki fumbled the ball for an error.

Seattle scored two in the fifth and one in the sixth off Duchscherer, and he exited the game trailing 5-4.

Duchscherer said he doesn't nearly have the consistency as when he last pitched regularly in 2008.

"The last time I pitched (in 2008), I had good stuff," he said. "I could spot my pitches with movement. I'm still battling to get that part of it."

Rookie Tyson Ross came on for his big league debut to relieve Duchscherer, and the Bishop O'Dowd High and Cal product delivered 21/3 scoreless innings.

His highlight was a strikeout of Ken Griffey Jr., who swung through a fastball in the eighth.

"That was insane," Ross said. "He's someone I've idolized since I was a little kid."

TODAY: Mariners (Doug Fister 3-4 in 2009) at A's (Brett Anderson 11-11), 12:35 p.m. TV: MLB. Radio: 860-AM; 1640-AM

## **A's update: Bob Geren already tinkering with A's lineup**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

Fox gets start at DH against left-hander

It didn't take long for manager Bob Geren to tinker with his batting order, though he cautioned not to read too much into Wednesday's lineup against the Seattle Mariners.

Jake Fox was in the DH spot in place of Eric Chavez, and second baseman Mark Ellis batted second with Daric Barton dropping down to sixth.

Chavez went 1-for-9 through the A's first two games, and though Geren said Saturday that he considers Chavez his regular designated hitter, he also mentioned Monday that a rough estimate might have Chavez starting four to five games a week.

With Seattle throwing a left-hander in Ryan Rowland-Smith, Geren took the opportunity to give the right-handed hitting Fox his first start as an Athletic. Fox was acquired in December from the Chicago Cubs.

"He's a fine hitter and he's going to bring something to our lineup," Geren said. "He's a nice complement to Eric at DH."

Geren went with Ellis, another right-handed bat, as his No. 2 hitter against Rowland-Smith but said he still likes Barton in the second spot because of his plate discipline.

Barton was 0-for-5 through the first two games but drew four walks.

Brett Anderson faced Seattle five times last season as a rookie, his most starts against any team.

So it's fitting that the lefty makes his season debut against the Mariners this afternoon, then comes back and faces them Tuesday at Safeco Field in his second start.

Anderson went 2-2 with a 3.41 ERA against the Mariners in 2009.

"Even though they've got some new acquisitions, (Chone) Figgins I faced a bunch of times with Anaheim," Anderson said. "With most of their hitters, I've got an idea of what they're trying to do."

Reliever Michael Wuertz (shoulder tendinitis) said he believes he could begin a minor league rehab assignment in seven to 10 days, and that two outings could have him ready to rejoin the A's bullpen.

Conceivably, that could have him returning for a three-game series against the New York Yankees on April 20-22, although the following series against Cleveland might be more realistic.

Wuertz threw from the mound Wednesday, though the catcher was standing in front of home plate.

## **President Obama says he grew up as an Oakland A's fan**

Oakland Tribune 4/7/2010

President Barack Obama admitted on Monday that he used to be an Oakland A's fan while growing up in Hawaii.

Obama, who threw out the ceremonial first pitch at the Washington Nationals' game against Philadelphia, was interviewed by ESPN during the telecast when he revealed that he wasn't always a Chicago White Sox fan.

"I did not become a Sox fan until I moved to Chicago," Obama told a national television audience Monday. "I was growing up in Hawaii, so I ended up being an Oakland A's fan."

## **Chavez sits, Fox gets start at DH for A's; Ellis batting second**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 4/7/2010 5:38PM

There's a little different look to the A's lineup, with Jake Fox serving as DH in place of Eric Chavez, Mark Ellis batting second and Daric Barton dropping down to sixth. Yes, it's early for Chavez to be getting a day off. He told me before the game he feels good physically, and manager Bob Geren said the decision wasn't due to Chavez's health. Chavez had one sharp single last night, but he's 1-for-9 overall and hasn't looked in sync at the plate.

I think Geren likes getting the right-handed hitting Fox in there against Seattle lefty Ryan Rowland-Smith. And you'd think there's a chance Fox might catch tomorrow (day game after a night game), so it might make sense to get him some at-bats tonight. But it's going to be interesting to see how much Chavez plays if he stays cold at the plate. On one hand, you need to play the guys that are hot. On the other hand, the A's DFA'ed Jack Cust in order to make Chavez the regular DH. And if he's going to shake off rust from hardly playing the past three seasons, the only way to do that is to play ...

Geren downplayed the swap w/Ellis and Barton in the order. He thinks both have taken good at-bats, but likes Ellis hitting higher against the lefty Rowland-Smith.

Here's the A's lineup:

Davis CF; Ellis 2B; Sweeney RF; Kouzmanoff 3B; Suzuki C; Barton 1B; Fox DH; Buck LF; Pennington SS; Duchschere RHP.

Mariners lineup:

Ichrio RF; Figgins 2B; Kotchman 1B; Bradley LF; Griffey Jr. DH; Lopez 3B; Gutierrez CF; Johnson C; Wilson SS; Rowland-Smith LHP.

## **A'S 6, MARINERS 5**

### **Suzuki's double delivers 2nd straight walk-off win**

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

Justin Duchschere pitched in the big leagues for the first time since Aug. 18, 2008. Tyson Ross pitched in the bigs for the first time in his life. But at the end of Wednesday night, the A's won on a game-ending hit for the first time since, well, Tuesday night.

The A's beat the Mariners 6-5 at the Coliseum when Kurt Suzuki's seemingly catchable flyball to the left-field wall wasn't caught by Milton Bradley in the ninth. Kevin Kouzmanoff scored from first base, and the A's held another on-field celebration as Bradley slowly walked by the scrum on the way to Seattle's dugout along the first-base line.

"I kind of stopped at first base and saw him half jump up there and heard the ball bounce off the scoreboard," Suzuki said.

Bradley, traded to the Mariners in December after an irritable season with the Cubs, said, "Make your own assessment."

Ryan Sweeney opened the ninth inning with a single, and Kouzmanoff bunted into a fielder's choice, setting up Suzuki's seventh career game-ending hit. It wouldn't have gotten that far without the effort of Ross, who graduated from Oakland's Bishop O'Dowd High School and was drafted by the A's out of Cal.

Ross made his big-league debut by relieving Duchschere with two outs in the sixth and striking out Rob Johnson to end the inning. It was 5-4, Mariners, at that point, but Suzuki doubled home Mark Ellis - who won Tuesday's game with a 10th-inning single - with the tying run in the seventh.

Ross retired seven of nine batters, including Ken Griffey Jr. on a strikeout. With two outs and a runner aboard in the eighth, Kouzmanoff robbed Franklin Gutierrez with a diving stop at third, and Daric Barton made a long stretch at first, ending the rally.

"Nothing more I can ask for right now," Ross said. "This is something I looked forward to my whole life. Now that it's here, I'm going to soak it all in."

For Duchscherer, who surrendered five runs and seven hits in 52/3 innings, the victory wasn't his (it was Jerry Blevins'). Duchscherer had every right to feel like a winner considering the low points in his career and life since he previously pitched in a big-league game.

Bradley welcomed him back with a two-run homer in the first inning, but Duchscherer threw 101 pitches, something few (including manager Bob Geren) considered possible early in spring training. And maybe it was something the pitcher couldn't imagine last summer when he was diagnosed with clinical depression.

"The last time I pitched, I was really good," Duchscherer said of 2008. "I'm still battling to get to that point. Not only am I battling the physical part, but the mental and emotional parts. It doesn't come overnight. I want it to. It's my own internal stuff I've got to fight through and stay focused and confident it will come."

## **Anderson comfortable in No. 4 slot**

John Shea, Chronicle Staff Writer

**Brett Anderson** opened 2009 as the No. 4 starter, debuting against the Mariners, and emerged as the ace by season's end. So what does that get him in 2010? He's the No. 4 starter, debuting against the Mariners.

"It's the same spot, so I'm comfortable there. It doesn't matter," said Anderson, who'll start this afternoon's series finale. "I'm trying to follow what the other guys (**Ben Sheets, Dallas Braden** and **Justin Duchscherer**) did."

Anderson, 22, led last year's A's in wins (11) and strikeouts (150) and was second to **Trevor Cahill** in starts (30). Asked if he'd take last season all over again, he said, "I'll take the second half all over again and try to build on that."

That's because the lefty went 8-4 with a 2.96 ERA in his final 17 starts after going 3-7 with a 5.74 ERA in his first 13 starts.

Cahill, Oakland's other promising 22-year-old pitcher, is on the disabled list with a sore left shoulder. Anderson said he's anticipating a workload at least as heavy as last year's. He threw 175 1/3 innings, 31 1/3 fewer than Cahill.

**Wuertz's status:** Reliever **Michael Wuertz** said he felt fine after throwing off a mound for the first time since being shelved with a shoulder ailment. Wuertz hopes to go on a rehab assignment in 7 to 10 days and make two minor-league appearances before returning.

"It's been three days of (A's) games, and it feels like 100," Wuertz said. "It's my competitive nature wanting to be out there and not experiencing the DL before. I've become the biggest cheerleader we've got."

**Briefly: Ichiro Suzuki** extended his hitting streak against the A's to 23 games. His longest against one team: 26, Royals. ... **Jake Fox**, a right-handed hitter, was the DH instead of **Eric Chavez** against left-hander **Ryan Rowland-Smith**, but manager **Bob Geren** said it is not a platoon.

## **A's LEADING OFF**

John Shea, San Francisco Chronicle

**Long way from home:** The Mariners leave the Bay Area today after a five-night, six-day stay. They arrived Saturday, played the Giants in a Sunday exhibition, and are playing a four-game set in Oakland. Next: three games in Texas. They still haven't been to Seattle following spring training.

## **The plan for Eric the DH**

*John Shea reporting from the Coliseum, where the A's and Mariners play the third of a four-game set . . .*

While Bob Geren promises this is no platoon, he nevertheless pulled Eric Chavez from the lineup and inserted Jake Fox as the designated hitter with the Mariners pitching a lefty tonight, Ryan Rowland-Smith.

Geren said Chavez will return to the lineup for tomorrow's matinee when the M's throw righty Doug Fister.

Perhaps it's easy to predict how Chavez will be used in the upcoming Angels series. The Angels will throw righties, Matt Palmer and Jered Weaver, Friday night and Saturday night, and a lefty, Joe Saunders, on Sunday.

The guess is that Chavez rests Sunday, the day game after the night game.

Another change in the lineup, if only because the A's are facing a lefty: Mark Ellis and Daric Barton flip-flopped, so it's Ellis second and Barton sixth.

The lineup: CF Davis, 2B Ellis, RF Sweeney, 3B Kouzmanoff, C Suzuki, 1B Barton, DH Fox, LF Buck, SS Pennington.

## **NOTES**

### **Yankees twice as valuable**

Associated Press 4/8/2010

The Yankees are worth nearly twice as much as any other team, according to the annual estimates by Forbes magazine.

The Yankees were valued at \$1.6 billion, Forbes said Wednesday. Boston was next at \$870 million, followed by the Mets and Dodgers.

The Giants (\$483 million) were ninth. The A's (\$295 million) were next to last, just ahead of Pittsburgh.

**Ticket list:** Cubs tickets for non-premium sections average \$52.56 this season, the highest in the majors, the Team Marketing Report said in its annual study. The Red Sox were second and the Yankees third.

The A's (\$24.31) rank 13th and the Giants (\$23.28) 15th. The Diamondbacks (\$14.31) are the lowest.

The report ranks teams for a family of four's trip to the park. In that regard, the Yankees (\$411) are first, the Giants (\$223) sixth and the A's (\$187) 13th.

**L.A. rotation:** Dodgers Opening Day starter Vicente Padilla will go again Saturday ahead of No. 5 man Charlie Haeger.

## **A's walk off on Suzuki's double**

### **Ross tosses 2 1/3 scoreless innings in Major League debut**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Tyson Ross' ongoing fairytale story continues to lengthen by the day.

The infamous present-day chapter began just days ago when Ross became the A's only spring non-roster invitee to make the Major League roster. How it ends is unknown, but the middle part is sure to make for good reading.

And chances are he'll have a bookmark attached to Wednesday night's addition.

Making his Major League debut with two outs in the sixth in relief of starter Justin Duchscherer, Ross struck out Seattle's Rob Johnson to end the frame before going on to pitch two more shutout innings.

And by night's end, Ross and the A's were celebrating their second consecutive walk-off win -- a 6-5 victory over the Mariners -- thanks to a game-ending RBI double off the bat of Kurt Suzuki.

"I think my heart is probably still going a little bit," a beaming Ross said. "Hopefully it will slow down so I can get some sleep tonight."

Either way, perhaps Ross will find himself dreaming about striking out Ken Griffey Jr. before waking up to realize he already did after a tough eight-pitch battle in the eighth.

"That was just insane, really," Ross said. "He's someone I idolized, and to get him on a strikeout was pretty trippy."

The same could be said of the way the A's won. After Kevin Kouzmanoff reached first base on a fielder's choice, Suzuki came to the plate against Seattle's Mark Lowe and ran up a full count before launching one to the left-field wall that nearly clipped Milton Bradley's glove.

"I was really excited that the runner was going to [score]," Suzuki said. "There was a great pitcher out there and he made a great pitch. I just put the barrel on it, and it went."

"Once I hit it, I thought it had a chance to get out. I kind of paused at first base when I saw him half-jump out there, and I heard it bounce off the scoreboard. Kouz was getting ready to round third, so I kept running just in case."

Most of their teammates were already on the field by that time, celebrating yet another walk-off win following Mark Ellis' game-winning single in Tuesday's game.

"It was a tough ballgame," Seattle manager Don Wakamatsu said. "That's the third game in a row these guys have played us extremely tough. I have to tip my hat to those guys. They kept pecking away. They had 13 or 14 hits and never gave up."

Oakland, in fact, had 14 hits, including a solo shot from Rajai Davis in the third against Seattle starter Ryan Rowland-Smith. Davis, Ellis, Kouzmanoff, Suzuki, Ryan Sweeney and Travis Buck all notched two hits in an effort to aide Duchscherer, who walked away with a no-decision in his first start since Aug. 18, 2008.

The A's righty, who missed all of last season following elbow surgery and a bout with clinical depression, labored through five innings en route to surrendering seven hits, five runs and a walk while fanning four with 101 pitches.

"I basically feel indifferent," said Duchscherer, who rated his performance "average." "I never felt good. I felt like I was battling. I was battling trying to get people out."

Duchscherer appeared noticeably different compared to his six-inning shutout performance against the Giants in an exhibition game Thursday, but he insisted otherwise.

"The results looked good," he said, "but I think my stuff was about the same."

Duchscherer pitched in just three spring games and noted he's still waiting for that "life, velocity and movement" that came to him so easily as an All-Star in 2008.

"It's difficult because the last time I pitched, I was really good," he said. "Not only am I battling the physical part of it, but I'm battling the mental and emotional part of it. It doesn't come overnight. I want it to. It's my own internal stuff I have to fight through and [if I] stay focused and confident, it will come."

Duchscherer's return to the mound may not have been all he hoped for, but in the end, he was simply thankful the team slid out with a win. As for Ross -- a Cal Berkeley product who attended high school in Oakland -- he's thankful for plenty right about now.

"It could have been a blowout or a close game like that -- either way, I was going to be pretty shaky," he said. "It's crazy. It's something I've always wanted to do -- pitch in a Major League game for my hometown team."

Added manager Bob Geren: "Ideally you try to break a rookie in during a game that's not so close, but if the last three games are any indication, he would never pitch. That being said, after his impressive debut tonight, he has really looked solid. I'm not afraid to put him in any situation. He was terrific."

## **A's-Mariners finale to be battle of ages**

When Seattle's Mike Sweeney steps in the batter's box against Oakland's Brett Anderson it's going to be a battle of the ages.

Sweeney, who is scheduled to make his first start as the DH in Thursday's series finale against the A's, is 36. Anderson is 22.

"I had a pretty good idea about two weeks into camp that [Sweeney] was going to be on the team," Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu said. "He was a long shot, but knowing his makeup, you almost had a feeling before camp started that he was going to make it hard on us, and he did."

He sure did. Sweeney batted .500 in Spring Training.

"He's in the best shape I've seen him," Wakamatsu continued. "He's a little lighter, a little leaner. He had some knee issues last year, but doesn't seem to have any problems with that. He's running the bases fine."

Doug Fister is scheduled to make his first start of the season for the Mariners after making the Opening Day roster for the first time in his career. He went 0-3 with a 6.94 ERA in five Spring Training starts. He left his start on March 19 at Cincinnati after being hit by a line drive in the arm.

Moreover, he made his Major League debut in 2009 and was 1-0 in two starts against the A's last season, surrendering just two earned runs in 12 innings. His forte is using both sides of the plate and putting the ball in play. Opposing hitters batted .264 against him last season and hit 11 home runs.

Anderson heads into his first start looking to see a vast improvement from his changeup. Last year, he set an Oakland rookie record with 150 strikeouts and led the team in both strikeouts and wins (11) while finishing second in starts (30).

"I'm trying to use it how I'd use it in a game, early in the count -- 1-0, 0-1, 1-1 -- where you can minimize your pitch count," he said. "So I've been really trying to work it into my game."

Heading into the finale, the A's won two of the first three games in the series in walk-off fashion. Oakland catcher Kurt Suzuki was the hero in Wednesday's 6-5 win.

## **Leading Off: Evidence to expand replay in baseball mounts**

Bill Bradley, Sacramento Bee, 4/8/2010

It's three days into the baseball season and there were two good reasons on Opening Day to expand instant replay:

- Exhibit A: Braves outfielder Nate McLouth makes a diving catch, but the ball pops out of his glove. The umpires don't see the drop and Cubs manager Lou Piniella blows a gasket.
- Exhibit B: Replays showed during the A's-Mariners game that Rajai Davis dropped a liner hit by Casey Kotchman, but the umpires also ruled it an out.

We've weathered two postseasons of bad umpiring and all Major League Baseball will review is home-run calls. What will it take to review all calls that aren't balls and strikes?

Baseball will say that reviewing more plays will delay the games. Funny how no one quibbles about managers' tantrums and long pitching changes.

It's a good bet that expanded replays will keep a lot of managers from being ejected besides getting more decisions right.

### **What to surf**

[www.youtube.com/watch" target="\\_blank">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nqx-xZoGJhQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nqx-xZoGJhQ): **See how bad the umpire's call was on McLouth's play.**

### **What to do**

**MLB, Mariners at A's, 12:35 p.m., Oakland Coliseum:** It will be 65 degrees and sunny at the Coliseum.

### **What to watch**

**Golf, The Masters, 1 p.m., ESPN:** You'll get to see a lot of Tiger Woods today.

### **The last word**

What you're saying on sacbee.com comments: • *As of right now, at this exact moment, we have the 3rd-worst record in the League. How freaking sweet would it be if it stayed that way till the end of the season? Then watch us get that #1 pick once they start grabbing ping pong balls and then man'o'man, watch out.*

– *koolaidkid on "Kings lack bite, lose 8th in a row"*

## **Suzuki's double lifts A's to past Mariners**

## **Duchscherer pitches in game for first time since Aug. 2008**

By JOSH DUBOW, ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Kurt Suzuki hit an RBI double with one out in the ninth inning to lead the Oakland Athletics to a 6-5 victory over the Seattle Mariners on Wednesday night.

Suzuki's seventh career walkoff hit provided a happy ending to a night that began with the return of Justin Duchscherer to the mound. Duchscherer missed all of last season while recovering from elbow surgery and dealing with a bout of clinical depression. He pitched into the sixth in his first appearance in nearly 20 months and ended up with a no-decision.

With Kevin Kouzmanoff running from first with one out in the ninth, Suzuki hit a drive to the wall in left field off Mark Lowe (0-1). Milton Bradley reached up to try to make the catch, but the ball appeared to hit off his glove and Kouzmanoff raced around to score.



Jerry Blevins (1-0) got the final out of the ninth to earn the win for Oakland.

Bradley earlier hit a two-run homer for his first hit with the Mariners and Jose Lopez added three hits and a scored a run.

Tyson Ross had a memorable major league debut for Oakland, pitching 2 1-3 scoreless innings and striking out Ken Griffey Jr.

Ross was helped by a diving stop by Kouzmanoff at third base that robbed Franklin Gutierrez of an extra-base hit to end the eighth inning.

Rajai Davis homered and scored two runs and Kurt Suzuki hit an RBI double off Brandon League to tie the game at 5 for Oakland with two outs in the seventh. That took Duchscherec off the hook for the loss.

After giving up Bradley's homer in the first inning, Duchscherec retired nine straight batters starting in the second and took a 3-2 lead into the fifth after an error by right fielder Ichiro Suzuki allowed a run to score in the fourth.

Gutierrez started a rally for Seattle when he singled and advanced to second on one of Duchscherec's two wild pitches in the game. Jack Wilson tied the game with a one-out single and later scored the go-ahead run on a sacrifice fly by Chone Figgins.

After the A's tied the game in the bottom half on a sacrifice fly by Daric Barton, the Mariners took the lead for good in the sixth when Lopez singled with two outs, went to second on a wild pitch and scored on Gutierrez's single to center on Duchscherec's 101st pitch of the night.

Duchscherec allowed five runs and seven hits in 5 2-3 innings in his first major league appearance since leaving a game in Minnesota on Aug. 18, 2008, with an injured hip. The two-time All-Star then had elbow surgery last March before his depression ended any chance at a comeback last season.

## NOTES

In a scoring change from Tuesday's game, Ryan Sweeney was credited with a hit in the first inning instead of an error on Seattle 3B Jose Lopez. ...

Seattle LHP Cliff Lee threw off a bullpen mound for the first time since straining his abdominal muscle. Lee threw eight pitches from flat ground and eight off the mound. Manager Don Wakamatsu said says Lee will throw 25 pitches off the rubber on Friday. ...

Athletics reliever Michael Wuertz (right shoulder tendinitis) threw off a mound before the game and could be ready for a minor league rehab assignment sometime next week.

## **Urban: On Zito, Duke, Tom Tom Club**

Mychael Urban, CSNBayArea.com 4/7/2010

What must it feel like knowing that people want you to fail? That people actually get juiced when you fail. That against all logic, they celebrate your failures.

Barry Zito knows exactly what all of that feels like. Some people who consider themselves Giants fans want him to struggle even though it means the Giants are likely to lose when he does. It baffled Zito, whose mother taught him to look for and embrace goodness wherever he goes.

That he'd get verbally beat up whenever he'd show his face in public made him miserable for a good 30 months.

Not anymore, though. Not since about halfway through the 2009 season. That's when he stopped focusing on feeling the fans' wrath and truly *understanding* it.

Huge difference, that. For 30 months or so after signing with the Giants for \$126 million after the 2006 season, Zito tried to earn every dollar of that unfathomable deal. Talk about a fruitless harvest. Nobody deserves that kind of money, so nobody could possibly justify making it.

But Zito tried, and along the way he lost his way. He was so focused on living up to the largesse, he lost focus altogether, most significantly on the most simple of things: Baseball is fun.

Winning is fun, too, and that's what Zito did Tuesday night in Houston. It was enough to keep the haters at bay for a day (although they'll surely note that he "only" lasted six innings), and it was enough for Zito.

He knows that his money means he'll never win certain fans over. Again, he finally understands it. As long as he keeps that in mind, he's at least got a chance to start finding that goodness again -- and perhaps make fewer people feel good when he fails.

OK, enough with the serious stuff. The Giants are 2-0, the A's got in the win column Tuesday, and it's time for a few laps around the Bay ...

... A's lefty Dallas Braden can't feel a few toes on his left foot, but it was the Mariners who were left feeling a numb by the time Braden was done pinching out a career-high 10 in seven innings. Braden, remember, is supposed to have the least impressive stuff on the Oakland staff. The Mariners might disagree.

... The A's didn't sell out their season opener. Wow. Just wow. And sad. Kudos to the fans who put their feelings for Uncle Lew aside and got out to the yard. The players appreciate it more than you know.

... Did Brandon Medders already lose the trust of the Giants' coaching staff?

Can we please stop calling guys "professional hitters"? They get paid. They hit. That, by definition, makes them professional hitters. So why do so many lazy analysts continue to drop the phrase like they're taking you deep inside the game? Knock it off.

Aubrey Huff hasn't made an error, he came up with the tie-breaking knock Tuesday, and his hard slide at second base shortly thereafter gave Zito and the Giants some much-needed breathing room by allowing Mark DeRosa to avoid being doubled up at first and extending the sixth-inning rally. Huff, dare I say, is a professional baserunner.

If you're not pulling hard for Justin Duchscherer of the A's this year, you're just plain mean and don't appreciate a true craftsman on the mound. Not only has the man gone to mental hell and back while fighting clinical depression, but he's flat fun to watch when he's on his game, as he was against the Giants last week. He's the king of expertly straddling the fence between working the corners of the plate and going right after guys. In fact, nobody does it better

And finally, a quick request for Giants fans: Your team has the best bullpen in baseball. Not even close. Got any ideas for a collective nickname? Lemme know

That's all the time we have for now. Only 160 games left, and it's time to get ready for Wednesday night's A's pre and post with Shooty. Until then, peace, a five-layer burrito from Taco Bell at 12:30 a.m., and "Genius of Love" by the Tom Tom Club to all.