



SEATTLE MARINERS NEWS CLIPS

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Mariners bullpen falters in 6-5 loss to Oakland

Oakland's Kurt Suzuki drilled a deep fly ball past the glove of Milton Bradley at the left-field wall in the ninth inning, handing reliever Mark Lowe and the Mariners a 6-5 walkoff loss.

By Geoff Baker

Seattle Times staff reporter

OAKLAND, Calif. - The realities of a six-man bullpen began hitting the Mariners about as hard as their opponent was by the time the fifth inning rolled around.

It was clear by then that Seattle starter Ryan Rowland-Smith would have to scratch and claw just to make it through the minimum five innings his team desperately needed Wednesday night.

After that, it was Russian roulette time, as the Mariners played a guessing game with their limited relief corps, squeezing every last pitch they could out of some arms.

But they couldn't get the job completely done as Kurt Suzuki drilled a deep fly ball past the glove of Milton Bradley at the left-field wall in the ninth inning, handing reliever Mark Lowe and the Mariners a 6-5 walkoff loss.

After the game, manager Don Wakamatsu suggested the team would have to call up another bullpen arm if a similar long-relief scenario occurs in Thursday's series finale.

"We can't keep going like this," Wakamatsu said.

The second walkoff defeat in two nights for the Mariners, in front of 18,194 at the Coliseum, has them crossing their fingers that starters Doug Fister and Jason Vargas don't implode these next two days.

Wednesday, Seattle's offense broke out, only to see leads of 2-0, 4-3 and 5-4 squandered by starter Rowland-Smith and a bullpen taxed to the limit.

The Mariners gambled coming into the season that they could avoid a seventh reliever in the bullpen in order to use the roster spot on a position player. It was a risky move, given the uncertainties facing some of the team's starting pitchers with injured Cliff Lee almost certain to miss the month of April.

"It's getting tougher and tougher when you play these close games," Wakamatsu said. "Just trying not to abuse guys and keep guys ready for tomorrow. There are guys you don't want to use and then all of a sudden (Shawn) Kelley's your last guy down there. But it's tough. These guys have done a good job. We're battling and these guys will come out strong (Thursday) again."

Seattle got through the season's first two games in decent shape, with starter Ian Snell turning in six strong innings on Tuesday. But Rowland-Smith was in pitch-count trouble from the first inning on and barely made it through five frames.

It took a saving catch by Bradley in the left-field corner in the fifth to spare Rowland-Smith at least a couple of additional runs. Bradley had opened the scoring in the first inning with a two-run homer to right field off A's starter Justin Duchscherer and also made a sliding catch down the line on a Ryan Sweeney bloop in the bottom of that frame.

"I was throwing strikes," Rowland-Smith said. "I left the ball up a couple of times, got hit hard here and there, gave up a couple of bloopers and that was it. The pitch count just got up there with a couple of long at-bats."

To the point where it became a coin-toss as to whether he'd even make it through five innings.

Just how much bullpen trouble the Mariners were facing became apparent when, after Rowland-Smith had given up the tying run in the fifth, they left the Aussie southpaw in to face right-handed batter Jake Fox. That roll of the dice worked, as Fox grounded into a fielder's choice and the Mariners were able to save reliever Sean White for the sixth inning.

Seattle even positioned Rowland-Smith for the win as Jack Wilson singled home Franklin Gutierrez to give the Mariners a 5-4 lead in the top of the sixth.

But Brandon League began the seventh, gave up a tying run on a Suzuki double, then worked into the eighth. League's pitch count was already in the 30s by the time the Mariners frantically began warming up Lowe as the A's put two on with one out.

"As the game went on, we sort of sat there and let each other know, 'Hey, this might be the situation,' " Lowe said of his fellow relievers. "I kind of got a feeling they were going to go with me that inning. I knew I was the next guy up."

Lowe finally came on after League's 40th pitch - his single-game high was 34 with Toronto last season - and caught Mark Ellis looking at a called third strike to end the eighth. But Sweeney singled off Lowe to open the ninth and then, one out later, scored all the way from first when Bradley could not come up with Suzuki's blast.

"It was the highest of the highs and the lowest of the lows to end the game," Lowe said with a shrug.

The trick now is for the Mariners to help ensure these bullpen lows don't last a whole lot longer than this one game.

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For the record

W-L W PCT
1-2 .333

Streak: L2

Home: 0-0

Road: 1-2

vs. AL West: 1-2

vs. L.A.: 0-0

vs. Oakland: 1-2

vs. Texas: 0-0

vs. AL East: 0-0

vs. AL Cent: 0-0

vs. NL: 0-0

vs. LHP: 0-1

vs. RHP: 1-1

Day: 0-0

Night: 1-2

One-run: 0-2

Extra inngs.: 0-1

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SeaTac Airport offers Mariners' deal

Seattle-Tacoma International Airport is offering a 50 percent parking discount if fans take Link Light Rail to Safeco Field.

Seattle-Tacoma International Airport is offering a 50 percent parking discount if fans take Link Light Rail to Safeco Field.

The rate is available for the Mariners' first homestand April 12-21, when customers will pay \$2 an hour for parking at the airport.

The discount begins two hours before games. Discounted parking is available for up to eight hours and will automatically be credited at the special rate when fans exit the airport parking garage.

The round trip fare from SeaTac/Airport station on Link Light Rail to the Stadium station is \$5.

Times staff and news services

Once reluctant Lopez is comfy playing at third

Mariners notes: Infielder Jose Lopez says he'll play just about anywhere as long as he gets in Seattle lineup

LARRY LARUE; Staff writer

The Tacoma News Tribune

Published: 04/08/10 12:05 am

OAKLAND - Jose Lopez is making the transition to third base so well that even the errors he makes disappear overnight.

For those keeping score at home, Lopez remains errorless through two games this season. The official scorer who charged him with one on Tuesday reversed course and gave Ryan Sweeney a hit on the play after reviewing it Wednesday.

"I thought it was a hit," shrugged the Seattle third baseman.

Asked about playing third base after years at second, Lopez initially talked about playing the position before - in the minor leagues - as if it were no big deal.

"I played second, third and shortstop," he said, "and up here, I've played first base, so I can play anywhere in the infield. As long as I'm in the lineup playing every day, I don't care where."

A full spring of working with new coach Mike Brumley helped prepare Lopez for plays he hadn't been asked to make in years, like the one Monday when he charged a bouncer, stepped on the bag for a forceout and then threw to first for an inning-ending double play.

"That wasn't an easy play, the timing of it, the throw to first," Lopez said. "But we have an advantage at first base."

Ah, that. In two games, Casey Kotchman's glove has probably erased what might have been three or four throwing errors from around the infield.

"He's beautiful over there," Lopez said. "You can throw him just about anything and he'll catch it."

Lopez said his first few spring games, he found himself asking, 'What the heck are you doing over here!' when he took the field. Now, he said, he's hoping the ball will be hit to him.

"I'm a third baseman, now," Lopez said.

Lee, Bedard update

Lee threw off a mound for the first time Wednesday, eight to 10 pitches, depending on who you were listening to. He will throw a 25-pitch bullpen session Friday and, on April 14 will pitch a simulated game.

“We’re going to build his pitch count up in simulated games, then send him out - for one, two games, we just don’t know yet,” general manager Jack Zduriencik said. “We’ll let his progress dictate.”

Sidelined since March 12 with a strained abdominal muscle, Lee is coming along faster than the team had hoped, but there’s still no return date.

Similarly, Bedard threw a 40-pitch bullpen session Wednesday and is well ahead of his once-projected June return. Whether that holds is another question, but he’s throwing well and, like Lee, will soon begin simulated games.

Bedard hasn’t pitched since last July. He had shoulder surgery in August.

Short hops

Former Oakland outfielder **Eric Byrnes** on Athletics fans: “When I was here, we had the best 13,000 fans in baseball. Now, they’ve got the best 10,000 fans. It’s not the team - no one wants to come to this ballpark.” ... In their first two games, covering 19 innings, the Mariners didn’t have one inning in which they managed more than one hit. ... Catcher **Adam Moore** has now started six big-league games - and two of those have gone extra innings. In those six starts, he’s caught 592/3 innings. ... Eighty-six of their 162 games last season were determined by two runs or fewer, and so were the Mariners’ first two games of 2010.

On tap

Seattle completes this four-game stay in Oakland with a 12:37 p.m. game today that will be televised on FSN. Probable starting pitchers: **Doug Fister** vs. **Brett Anderson**.

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M's bow in bottom of ninth

MARINERS: Run-scoring double gives Oakland a 6-5 victory over Seattle

LARRY LARUE; Staff writer

The Tacoma News Tribune

Published: 04/08/10 12:05 am

OAKLAND - Three days into the 2010 season, the Seattle Mariners and Oakland Athletics have played three games that either team could have won.

That wasn’t much comfort for the Mariners, who lost for the second time Wednesday on a bottom-of-the-ninth-inning, tie-breaking double just over the glove of outfielder Milton Bradley - a hit that gave the Athletics a 6-5 victory and left Seattle with a 1-2 record.

“Three tough, tough games,” manager Don Wakamatsu said, and it wasn’t hyperbole.

The Mariners won Monday with a ninth-inning hit, lost Tuesday in the 10th inning and again Wednesday when Kurt Suzuki doubled off reliever Mark Lowe.

“I thought it was a good pitch, but he hit it,” Lowe said. “I thought Milton would catch it on the track, but it had more carry.”

Bradley, who had homered in the first inning and made a couple of fine running catches, wanted no part of giving anyone a blow-by-blow account of the final play.

“I got nothing for you, make your own assessment,” Bradley said.

Not all Mariners games are alike, though they seem to all come down to the final inning.

In the first two of the season, their starters were superb, their offense sketchy. How sketchy? In their first 19 innings, the Mariners never managed more than one hit in an inning.

That's thin.

Against Oakland's Justin Duchscherer, however, scoring wasn't the problem. When Bradley followed a first-inning walk to Casey Kotchman with his first home run, Seattle was ahead, 2-0.

"We played well, offensively, we were aggressive on the bases, we got production from the bottom of our lineup," Wakamatsu said. "We played well. The A's just played better than we did tonight."

Down by two runs in the fifth inning, the Mariners got their first three-hit rally of the season - singles by Franklin Gutierrez, Jack Wilson and Ichiro Suzuki - and when Chone Figgins flied out to left field to score Wilson, it was 4-4.

No hitting, you say? Seattle broke that tie with two more hits and a run in the sixth. This time, they needed Oakland's help. With two out and no one on, Jose Lopez singled and took second base on a Duchscherer wild pitch.

Gutierrez singled him home for a 5-4 lead.

That offense would have looked stronger if starter Ryan Rowland-Smith had been having a good night, but he wasn't.

Rowland-Smith wasn't smooth and his innings weren't always pretty, but he doggedly went about the business of getting as far as he could without his best stuff.

"Ryan never found a rhythm," Wakamatsu said.

When Bradley's home run put Seattle up in the first inning, Rowland-Smith needed 27 pitches to get his first three outs, and Oakland cut that lead to 2-1 in the bottom of the first.

On a 2-2- pitch to open the third inning, Rowland-Smith hung a curve and Rajai Davis, off-balance, hit it off his front foot but tucked it just inside the left-field foul pole for his first home run.

Tie game.

Oakland kept picking away, and went ahead in the fourth inning on an unearned run. Daric Barton singled, Travis Buck doubled and Ichiro fumbled the ball away into foul territory, allowing Barton to score.

Rowland-Smith faced six hitters in the bottom of the fifth, giving up the tying run again and throwing his 96th pitch to get his 15th out.

The problem, of course, is that the Seattle bullpen had already pitched six innings in the first two games of this series, and was now asked to eat four more.

It couldn't.

Once the Mariners took the lead in the sixth, Wakamatsu's options changed from keeping the game close to protecting a lead.

Sean White worked a 1-2-3 sixth inning, getting two ground-ball outs. Brandon League was brought in to work the seventh but gave up two hits, the second a two-out, RBI double to catcher Suzuki.

Tied again.

To win, Seattle needed another run - at least. The out-of-town scoreboard in left field showed them that the Rangers (1-1) had lost, the Angels (1-2) had lost, and if they could beat the Athletics, Oakland would be 1-2, too.

If the month of April is about hanging close until pitchers Cliff Lee and Erik Bedard return, then sporting the only 2-1 record in the American League West after three games would be a solid start.

The Athletics had other ideas.

When Lopez singled with two outs in the eighth inning - his third hit of the game - Gutierrez grounded what appeared to be a certain RBI double down the left-field line. Third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff made a diving stop, a strong throw and took away a hit.

In the bottom of the ninth, Lowe gave up a single, then pounced on a bunt and threw runner Ryan Sweeney out at second base. Suzuki then hit his towering fly ball, Bradley retreated but ran out of room, and the Mariners ran out of time.

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Back in Cheney for a reason

Rainiers: Tacoma's Michael Saunders reached Seattle last year, but hitting didn't keep him there; he's back here to work on his craft

RYAN DIVISH; Staff writer

The Tacoma News Tribune

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Maybe Michael Saunders knew it was eventually going to happen. Maybe it was inevitable with the players the Seattle Mariners acquired during the offseason. Maybe he knew it was for the best for him and for the Seattle Mariners.

But that didn't stop him from hurting a little inside that Thursday morning - the day after St. Patrick's Day - in Peoria, Ariz., when Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu told him he wasn't going to make the big league team and was headed back to Tacoma to start the 2010 season.

Saunders emerged from the office wearing a look of anguish and disappointment. Fast forward to 24 hours before today's Rainiers season opener at Cheney Stadium, there was still almost an emotional wince when Saunders talked about that day. He had tasted the good life of the big leagues and understood what it means to be there.

"When you first get told you are being sent down, no one is going to be happy about it," Saunders said. "But the fact of the matter is I have things to work on."

And no matter how bad it hurts not being with the Mariners right now, he will address those things he has to work on with passion so he may join the Mariners in the future, and hopefully never have to be told that he's being sent down again.

"Hopefully, when that opportunity comes, I'll be ready," he said. "And I will stay up there."

STAYING IN THE MOMENT

Some players who are sent down can be so upset about not being in the big leagues that it leaves them unfocused and bitter and full of blame.

As Rainiers manager Daren Brown said, "The quicker you get over it, the quicker you go to work to get back."

Saunders seems to have gotten over it. He certainly isn't the type of player to remain bitter. He's 23 years old and still considered a prospect - ranked No. 30 in Baseball America's Top 100 prospects for 2010.

When Mariners general manager Jack Zduriencik traded for Milton Bradley, re-signed Ryan Langerhans and signed Eric Byrnes, Saunders didn't feel the least bit slighted.

"The bottom line is Jack and the front office are trying to make that team the best it can possibly be," Saunders said. "You can't fault a GM or anybody else for trying to make a team better."

Saunders got his first opportunity with the Mariners last season, called up in July after hitting .310 in 64 games with the Rainiers. But it didn't go exactly as planned. He was in 46 games and hit .221 (27-for-122) with a double, three triples and four RBI. He struck out 40 times, walked six times.

During that time, he experienced an 0-for-24 stretch and was benched for a stretch of games while he worked with hitting coach Alan Cockrell to retool his swing.

Saunders didn't pout or complain. He simply attacked the sessions working hard and soaking up the instruction. It's the same attitude he's bringing to the Rainiers.

"You only can control what you can control," he said. "I can't be thinking about what the big team is doing. I'm just going to focus on what I need to do every day to get better."

Brown isn't worried about Saunders' effort level or attitude. Thus far Saunders has never given him a reason to.

"He understands that it's time to go to work to get where he wants to get," Brown said. "He's a hard-working kid and he'll get it done."

SWING CHANGES

What the average Rainiers or Mariners fan might see tonight at Cheney Stadium is the 6-foot-4, 225-pound Saunders moving his big frame into the batter's box and will look essentially the same as last season.

But he isn't the same.

Mariners coaches and Saunders have worked long hours on several "minor adjustments," as Saunders labeled them, to his stance and swing. They aren't glaring or even noticeable.

"To the naked eye, you probably won't notice it," Rainiers hitting coach Alonzo Powell said. "He still looks like the same Michael Saunders from last year."

They seem minor enough that Saunders wasn't quite sure how to explain them.

"It would probably be easier to show you than talk about it," he said.

So instead of trying to do that, or confusing people with baseball jargon and swing talk, indications are the changes come down to Saunders' legs. Powell called it "staying into his legs."

In the past, Saunders hit from a fairly upright, shorter stance, almost straight-legged. But at 6-4 with all those arms and moving parts, he could get off balance or take too long a stride, leaving him out of position on certain pitches.

The idea is to get Saunders started in what Powell calls "a more athletic position" at the plate, with a little bend at the hips and knees. That should make his swing more compact.

"I'm trying not to come up in my swing," Saunders said. "I'm trying to stay grounded in my swing. Power comes from the ground up. I just want to get a little more consistent in my legs, which allows me to see the ball and track the ball a little better."

While people think a swing is mostly arms and hips, all of that can be thrown out of whack from poor positioning of the feet.

"The swing starts in your lower half, it starts with the back of the knee," Saunders said.

With his legs under him, Saunders should recognize pitches better, stay on pitches longer and spray them all over the field instead of over-committing to pull pitches.

While it may not seem major, it was different for Saunders.

"It was different, especially when you've been doing it one way your whole life," he said. "But I adapted to it quickly. I really trusted my coaches and what they were telling me."

Some players aren't quite as trustful and can be resistant to change.

"To Mike's credit, he embraced the changes," Powell said.

Part of it came from the knowledge that he needed to do it to have hitting success in the big leagues.

"I know this is going to help me for my future," he said. "Each level you go up, you get exposed a little more. As soon as one person finds and exploits a weakness, everyone else follows. This will help me be more consistent and that's the goal."

It's a goal that could help him reach the bigger goal of returning to and staying with Mariners.

Three things about the Rainiers to watch this season

Greg Halman's progress against Triple-A pitching

There's little question about Halman's talent or his potential. He has worked hard to become more consistent in his approach at the plate. Now he'll get the chance to prove it. If he does, he could provide the Mariners some much needed power.

When and who will be called up

Every Triple-A team and its roster is at the beck and call of the big-league club. And each year the team will lose players to the big leagues because of injuries or slumps. The Rainiers have plenty of candidates. Expect infielder Josh Wilson, left-hander Luke French and first baseman Mike Carp to be among those who could get an early call.

Can they return to the postseason

Well, at times early in the season, it seemed like the postseason wasn't even a possibility. But last season's late run changed that. Looking at the roster, the Rainiers don't have the experience that they did last season, but their roster will change as the season goes. Expect LHPs Ryan Feierabend, Cesar Jimenez and possibly Nick Hill to make appearances, while outfielder Mike Wilson, second baseman Dustin Ackley and maybe even shortstop Carlos Triunfel could also end up in Tacoma.

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Tacoma Rainiers to honor region's fallen officers Saturday

STACEY MULICK; Staff writer

The Tacoma News Tribune

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The Tacoma Rainiers on Saturday will honor six Puget Sound-area officers killed in the line of duty last year.

The 7 p.m. baseball game will be a "tribute to and celebration of the lives of Western Washington's fallen officers," according to a team statement. The team is calling Saturday "S.H.I.E.L.D." night. (S.H.I.E.L.D. stands for Safety, Honor, Integrity, Enforce, Leadership, Defend.)

Proceeds from the single game tickets for Saturday's matchup will be donated to the Lakewood Police Independent Guild Charitable Fund to help the families of police Sgt. Mark Renninger and officers Tina Griswold, Ronald Owens and Greg Richards.

The four officers, along with Seattle police officer Timothy Brenton and Pierce County sheriff's deputy Kent Mundell, were killed in late 2009.

Before Saturday night's game, the Metro Pierce and Pierce County honor guard will present the nation's colors and a Lakewood police officer will sing "God Bless America."

The Rainiers will wear special jerseys that will be signed and auctioned off. Throughout the season, the team will wear Lakewood police patches bearing the initials of Renninger, Griswold, Owens and Richards.

More than 200 law enforcement officers are expected to attend the game.

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Suzuki's double lifts A's beat Mariners 6-5

By JOSH DUBOW

AP SPORTS WRITER

OAKLAND, Calif. -- The night began with Justin Duchscherer's long-awaited return to the mound and was capped by a game-ending RBI double by Kurt Suzuki.

What made the postgame celebration possible was an impressive debut by a hometown kid.

Tyson Ross pitched 2 1-3 scoreless innings and struck out Ken Griffey Jr. in his major league debut to help the Oakland Athletics rally behind a pair of RBI doubles by Suzuki to beat the Seattle Mariners 6-5 on Wednesday night.

"What stands out is Tyson Ross," manager Bob Geren said. "Here's a kid who makes his big league debut in a really tight game. Ideally you try to break a rookie in in a game that's not close."

But this season-opening series hasn't provided those types of games, with all three contests heading into the ninth with the score tied.

Ross, who went to high school in Oakland and college at UC Berkeley, came into this game to relieve Duchscherer with two outs in the sixth inning. He struck out Rob Johnson to begin his career, keeping the Mariners' lead at 5-4.

After Suzuki tied the game in the seventh with his first double, Ross struck out Griffey in the eighth to help set the stage for the winning rally.

"That was insane," Ross said. "He's someone I idolized since being a kid and there he was standing 60 feet away. I'm happy I got the strikeout. That was a trip for me."

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 glance off his glove and hit off the wall. As the ball rolled away, Kouzmanoff raced around to score easily on Suzuki's seventh career game-ending hit.

"We have 19 games against these guys," Bradley said. "It will be like this every night. In that situation, Kurt is the last guy you want to see. He's swinging the bat well and carrying the team on his back.

That provided a happy ending to a night that began with the return of 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.

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

Bradley earlier hit a two-run homer for his first hit with the Mariners. Rajai Davis hit a solo shot for Oakland.

After giving up Bradley's homer in the first inning, Duchscherer 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.

Franklin Gutierrez started a rally for Seattle when he singled and advanced to second on one of Duchscherer'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 Jose Lopez singled with two outs, went to second on a wild pitch and scored on Gutierrez's single to center on Duchscherer's 101st pitch of the night.

"We played a good game, we manufactured a lot of runs but unfortunately we lost the ballgame," Lowe said.

Duchscherer said he was disappointed in his outing, saying his velocity, life and movement were all far from where they were before he was sidelined.

"It's difficult because the last time I pitched I was really good," Duchscherer said. "Today I didn't feel like I was there. Not only am I battling the physical part of it, but I'm battling the mental and emotional part of it too because you have to be patient. It doesn't come overnight, but I want it to."

Duchscherer 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: Ichiro Suzuki singled in the fifth inning to extend his hitting streak against Oakland to 23 games. ... 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.

Mariners lose seesaw battle to A's

Bradley hits first homer, but Seattle squanders three leads

By Jim Street / MLB.com

04/08/10 2:48 AM ET

OAKLAND -- Milton Bradley's first hit with the Mariners traveled about 400 feet and produced two runs in the first inning Wednesday night.

If only he could have extended his glove another inch or so in the ninth inning, he and the Mariners might have played long enough to walk away with smiles.

The Bradley blast got Seattle off to a good start in what turned out to be a back-and-forth tilt against the Athletics, but the third game of the four-game series ended the same way as the second -- with the home team walking off with a victory, this one a kick-in-the-gut, 6-5 defeat before 18,194 at the Oakland Coliseum.

The end came suddenly.

With one out, a runner on first and the count full on Athletics catcher Kurt Suzuki, Mariners right-hander Mark Lowe threw what he thought was a good pitch. But the ball was hit high and deep to left field and bounced against the wall, scoring Kevin Kouzmanoff with the decisive run.

Asked afterwards in a silent visiting clubhouse how close he came to the ball, Bradley said, "Make your own assessment."

Lowe said, "When it went up, I thought it would be caught at the [warning] track, but it carried more than I thought it would."

Suzuki, who contributed a single in the 10th inning of Tuesday night's walk-off win, was the man delivering the key blow in this one.

"You want to start the season strong while facing a great team like Seattle," he said. "You want to come out of the gates and match yourself up to see what it's like against the rival. They've got a great team, and we've played three great games.

The Mariners had three leads in the game, the last being a 5-4 advantage going into the bottom of the seventh inning, thanks to an RBI single to center by Franklin Gutierrez in the sixth inning.

But the Athletics pulled even with a run in the seventh off Brandon League and won it two innings later.

"That's the third game in a row those guys have played us extremely tough," manager Don Wakamatsu said. "I have to tip my hat to those guys. They kept pecking away and never gave up."

All three games have gone down to the wire. The Mariners won the series opener by scoring two runs in the ninth inning, but the Athletics have retaliated with two walk-off wins.

"It's always going to be competitive against them," Bradley said. "We have 19 games this year, or whatever we got, and it will be like this every night. In that situation, Kurt is the last guy you want to see. He's swinging the bat well."

The switch-hitting Bradley, hitless in his first seven at-bats this season swung the bat exceedingly well in the first inning, sending a Justin Duchscherer fastball into the right-field bleachers, giving left-hander Ryan Rowland-Smith a quick 2-0 lead.

But Seattle's offense went quiet for a few innings and the Athletics used single runs in the first, third, fourth and fifth to go ahead.

Rowland-Smith was able to stay away from a big inning, but each time the Mariners scored in the top of a frame, he surrendered a run in the bottom of the same inning.

"I just felt he never got the rhythm or the timing out there," Wakamatsu said. "Obviously, his pitch count got up and he didn't give us the length we needed with our bullpen right now."

Rowland-Smith's first start of the season ended after five innings and 101 pitches.

"I battled and stayed away from the big inning," he said. "I got the count to 3-and-2 on some guys and they would foul off a few pitches and that got my pitch-count up a bit. But overall, I felt fine and thought I was throwing strikes.

"I left the ball up a couple of times and got hurt."

Rajai Davis made Rowland-Smith pay for one such pitch, hitting a home run to left field in the third inning to tie the game at 2.

The Mariners are going with a six-man bullpen and already have used all of the relievers at least once, which is why Wakamatsu wanted at least one or two more innings from his starter.

Lowe was pitching for the second time in two nights.

"We are three games in and we have played three extremely tough ballgames," Wakamatsu said. "It's getting tougher and tougher [on the bullpen] when you play these close games. You try not to abuse guys."

The back-to-back walk-off losses are tougher on a team than losing by a wide margin, but Wakamatsu was encouraged by what he saw from his team.

"There are a lot of things we can build off this game, especially offensively," Wakamatsu said. "We talked of lack of production from the bottom of the order [on Tuesday], but we got it tonight."

Jose Lopez, batting fifth, went 3-for-4, scored a run and stole a base while Gutierrez, batting sixth, went 2-for-4, scored a run, had an RBI and was robbed of two hits, including what would have been a double down the third-base line that ended the eighth inning with a runner on first.

"I thought we played some pretty good baseball," Wakamatsu said. "Milton made a couple of nice plays early in the game to save some runs, but my hat is off to Oakland tonight. They played better than we did."

For the first time this young season, the Mariners' offense finally had more than one hit in one inning. Singles by Gutierrez, Jack Wilson and Ichiro Suzuki in the fifth inning was the first time in 24 frames.

[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.

A's-Mariners finale to be battle of ages

Jesse Sanchez

MLB.com

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.

- By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com

Lee, Bedard progressing well

Mariners southpaws expected to rehab in Minors

By Jim Street / MLB.com

04/07/10 9:34 PM ET

OAKLAND -- The news keeps getting better for Mariners left-handers Cliff Lee and Erik Bedard, who started the season on the 15-day disabled list.

Lee, sidelined since March 15 with a strained lower abdominal muscle, threw eight pitches off the bullpen mound at the Oakland Coliseum Wednesday afternoon and pronounced himself ready to have a more vigorous bullpen session on Friday.

"I threw pretty hard, pretty close to maximum effort and everything feels normal," he said. "I'll throw a bullpen on Friday [in Arlington] and go from there."

The brief Wednesday session basically was a test run. Lee had not been on a mound since March 18, and how he reacts to Friday's BP session would give the team more of an idea as to how soon he could make his regular-season debut.

"He threw eight pitches off the mound and says he's ready to pitch," manager Don Wakamatsu said. "He'll go 25 pitches off the rubber on Friday and we'll try to stretch him out to 40 the next time."

"The challenge is going to be holding him back to make sure we're safe."

General manager Jack Zduriencik said Lee, acquired from the Phillies for three players last December, would continue to take "baby steps" until he's completely healthy.

"Everybody was real pleased with what they saw and he said he felt good, but we want to make sure he's ready to roll when he's ready to roll," the GM said. "But today was very positive, very positive."

Bedard, meanwhile, continues to progress from the shoulder surgery he had last August to repair a torn labrum. He also threw a bullpen on Wednesday.

"He feels great and may be ahead [of Lee] in a sense," Wakamatsu said.

Mariners pitching coach Rick Adair has made some mechanical changes in Bedard's delivery and they seem to be working. The changes have taken some of the pressure off Bedard's shoulder and arm.

Both pitchers are expected to throw some simulated games and then go on rehab assignments to the Minor Leagues.

Lee tentatively is scheduled to throw a simulated game next Wednesday at Safeco Field, take a couple of days off and then throw another two-inning simulated game.

Lee figures to be recalled after reaching the 75- to 80-pitch count in the Minors. But he also faces a five-game suspension for throwing a pitch over the head of D-backs catcher Chris Snyder on March 15.

Lee appealed the suspension, which has yet to be resolved.

[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.

Close games still the norm

First two contests decided by two runs or less

By Jim Street / MLB.com

04/07/10 9:34 PM ET

OAKLAND -- Manager Don Wakamatsu became a little thinner under his baseball cap last season when the Mariners had 53 percent of their games decided by one or two runs.

They tied a club record with 86 one- or two-run games, won an MLB-leading 35 one-run games and combined to go 51-35 overall.

Here we go again.

The first two games in 2010 were decided by either one or two runs with the Mariners scoring two runs in the ninth inning for a 5-3 victory and then dropping a walk-off, 2-1, 10-inning decision to the Athletics on Tuesday night.

"I enjoy playing one-run games," he said. "I think it's healthy for the game. Would I rather have 10 runs a game? Absolutely. But I don't mind [close games]. If our pitching is where we think it can be, we should be in a lot of ballgames."

One Franklin not enough

OAKLAND -- Center fielder Franklin Gutierrez is swinging one of the few hot bats for the Mariners.

He's the only player with more than one hit in the first two games of the season, going 2-for-4 in Tuesday night's extra-inning loss to the Athletics.

Gutierrez extended his hitting streak to seven games, dating back to the final week of the 2009 season. He is batting .385 (10-for-26) with four doubles, four RBIs and six runs scored.

Worth noting: The extra-inning game on Tuesday night was the earliest the Mariners have played overtime since opening the 1996 season with a 12-inning game against the White Sox at Safeco Field. Seattle won it, 3-2. Seven years later, the Mariners and Athletics battled for 11 innings before Oakland notched a 7-6 walk-off victory in the third game of the season. ... One-third of catcher Adam Moore's career starts have gone extra innings. He has started six games and two of them have gone beyond nine innings. The first game Moore started lasted 14 frames. ... The Mariners had 11 hits in their first two games, but no more than one in the same inning. ... The error charged to third baseman Jose Lopez on Tuesday night was changed to a base hit on Wednesday morning by the official scorer.

[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.

MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL: Jaxx start play tonight

April 8, 2010

The Jackson Sun

Brandon Shields

Today is the day West Tenn Diamond Jaxx fans have been counting down to since Labor Day of last year.

Minor league baseball starts today. While we still have to wait six more days before getting a chance to watch pro baseball here in Jackson, the Jaxx open the season in Jacksonville, Fla., against the Suns.

The Jaxx coaching staff has a new look this season. Tim Laker (manager), Andy Fox (coach) and Lance Painter (pitching coach) will all be leading the Jaxx.

Before he even coaches the first game, this week has already been a busy one for Laker.

"I flew from Phoenix back home to California (Tuesday), and now we're on our way to meet the team in Florida," Laker said during a phone interview while he was waiting for a flight out of Birmingham, Ala., during a layover Wednesday. "I'm just getting some traveling in before the season starts."

This is Laker's first season in the Seattle Mariners' organization. He's been the catching coordinator for the Cleveland Indians' minor league system the past two seasons.

"It's great to be back out on the field and part of the team during the day-to-day operation of going through a season," Laker said. "I had a pretty good job with Cleveland, spending a week or two at a time working with the catchers with a team, then going home for a couple of weeks before going somewhere else.

"I'll miss all that time to spend at home with my family, but there's a big part of me that's just missed being in the dugout every day."

Laker, who played professionally for 19 seasons, said coaching in West Tennessee is admittedly not something he put a lot of thought into before getting a call from the Mariners during the offseason about joining the franchise. But he is looking forward to the opportunity to develop the team's young talent in the Southern League.

"This is a good organization to be a part of, and they've really overhauled their farm system over the past couple of seasons," Laker said. "They've got a lot of guys on this team that are really good, and I think we could see some of them in the big leagues before the end of the season depending on how they develop.

"Part of that development is up to me and the coaches and how hard they work, but they bring some talent to the table."

Today is the day that talent begins to showcase itself and tries to move up.

Brandon Shields is the sports editor of The Jackson Sun. Contact him at 425-9751 or at bjshields@jacksonsun.com.

Hill Ready to Roll with Mariners Affiliate

By Tim Hayes | Sports Writer / Bristol Herald Courier

Nick Hill knows that the 2010 season could be very special. That's why the former Sullivan East High School star is raring and ready to go.

"I feel real good," Hill said. "I'm ready to get the season going. I've been in Arizona for a few months now and I'm ready for the season to start."

Hill will look to continue his progression as one of the Seattle Mariners' top pitching prospects in his home state.

The left-hander will begin the season with the West Tennessee Diamond Jaxx, the Class AA affiliate of the Seattle Mariners. Hill pitched for West Tennessee last season and was named the team's most valuable pitcher.

His dominant performances set in motion an eventful series of events for Hill. He earned a promotion to Class AAA Tacoma at the tail end of the season, competed in the prestigious Arizona Fall League along with other top prospects and earned a non-roster invite to Seattle's major league spring training camp.

Hill spent a few weeks in Seattle's big league camp last month and got his first taste of the major-league life. He pitched an inning of relief in an exhibition game against the San Diego Padres.

It was an invaluable experience for the East alum as he rubbed shoulders with the likes of Cliff Lee, Ichiro Suzuki and Ken Griffey Jr.

"It was awesome," Hill said. "Just getting to be there and be around a lot of different players and see how they go about their business was good. It's just going to make me better in the long run. It was a blast."

Hill's most notable spring achievement came a few days after he was reassigned to Seattle's minor league camp. He combined with five relievers on a no-hitter in an exhibition game against minor leaguers from the Kansas City Royals' organization.

"Actually, I threw my three innings and went in," Hill said. "When everybody gets done they go in and ice their arm and stuff. I didn't even find out about [the no-hitter] until the next day. It was kind of funny."

Spring training ended on a sour note for two other former area prep stars.

Outfielder C.J. Lee was released by the Atlanta Braves' organization, while pitcher Chris Mobley was given his release from the Florida Marlins.

Lee, a former standout at Virginia High and East Tennessee State University, was let go by the Braves after playing three seasons in the minors.

Mobley, a Dobyns-Bennett High School graduate, had gotten as high as the Class AAA level with Florida and had racked up 81 saves in six minor league seasons.

Both players will try to hook on with other clubs.

Meanwhile, former John Battle High School star Jimmy Gobble is currently at the Colorado Rockies' spring training facility in Arizona recovering from a groin injury.

The left-handed relief pitcher had three Cactus League outings for Colorado, but tweaked his groin in a March 11 exhibition game against Texas. He'll be in Arizona for a few more weeks and then could be assigned to Colorado's Class AAA affiliate in Colorado Springs.

Virginia High graduate Kevin Barker, who earned a promotion to the Cincinnati Reds last August and played in 29 big league games, remains a free agent.

Former East Tennessee State University outfielder Stephen Douglas signed with the Amarillo Dillas of the independent United League on Tuesday. Douglas has spent the last three seasons on the indy scene after previously playing in the Cleveland Indians' system.

As for the major leagues, left-handed pitcher Billy Wagner is the lone local player currently on a big league roster. The former Tazewell High School star opened his 16th major league season on Monday by tossing a perfect ninth inning for the Atlanta Braves in a 16-5 victory over the Chicago Cubs.

The ups and downs of Oakland

Posted on April 7, 2010 at 3:26 PM

Jim Street

Mariners.com Blog

The best news of the day just arrived. The elevator that goes (sometimes) from the press box to the clubhouse level at the Coliseum is working again.

It was out of commission last Saturday, when the Giants played the Athletics in an exhibition game, and crashed again last night just before the National Anthem -- and it remained out of order for the remainder of the night.

Luckily, a couple of the local reporters here showed me how to get downstairs after the game. We had to go up to get down, and then around, and down.

Writers facing deadlines (like my friend Larry LaRue of the News Tribune) had no shot to hike, talk and write. So he stayed upstairs. A wise move.

Of all the stadiums in the Majors, this has to rank 30th. It would be lower, but there are only 30 teams, you know.

So far, the early-season bugs include 1) the faulty elevator and 2) an Internet system that is about as reliable as the Mariners offense.

Radio producer Kevin Cremin, who hauls about 1,000 pounds of equipment with him from city to city has his fingers crossed that the elevator keeps working through tomorrow afternoon. He would not be a happy man, otherwise.

The pitchers, along with Mike Sweeney, are getting their running in by catching footballs in right field. Quarterback Al Wirtala is throwing some tight spirals and Jason Vargas just made a one-handed, behind-the-back catch.

I was watching the sports news on TV today and noticed that David "Big Papi" Ortiz had a Major League snap last night when reporters reminded him that he's hitless so far this season in seven official at-bats. He reacted the way you might expect, with an expletive-laced tirade.

Wonder if I should remind Milton Bradley that he's 0-for-7 with four strikeouts. Nah.

Better save that one for a rainy day.

I was reminded via email today that Ken Griffey Jr. is the 27th player in MLB history to play in four decades. The record is five, held by Minnie Minoso, and the list includes Hall of Famers Jim O'Rourke, Dan Brubaker, Eddie Collins, Early Wynn, Ted Williams, Willie McCovey, Nolan Ryan, Carlton Fisk and Rickey Henderson.

Former Mariners pitcher Mike Morgan also is on the list, and he has the added distinction of playing for 12 organizations during his 23-year career, including three with Seattle in 1985-86-87.

And now for tonight's lineup:

1. Ichiro, RF
2. Chone Figgins, 2B
3. Casey Kotchman, 1B
4. Milton Bradley, LF
5. Ken Griffey Jr., DH
6. Jose Lopez, 3B
7. Franklin Gutierrez, CF
8. Rob Johnson, C
- 9 Jack Wilson, SS

LPH Ryan Rowland-Smith

-- Jim Street

Game #3: In search of a Mariners offense

Posted By Larry Larue on April 7, 2010 at 7:20 pm

The Tacoma News Tribune

Coming in, the Mariners had gone two games - 19 innings! - without collecting more than one hit in an inning.

So they came out swinging against Oakland's Justin Duchscherer tonight and scored twice in the first inning on ... well, on one hit, Milton Bradley's two-run homer followed a walk to Casey Kotchman. That's a 2-0 lead for Ryan Rowland-Smith, and one more run than the Mariners got last night.

- Rajai Davis stole second and took third on Rob Johnson's throwing error, and when Bradley made a diving catch of a Ryan Sweeney fly ball, Davis raced home. Should he have let it drop? When you get an out, take it. Seattle 2, Oakland 1.
- Still in the first, Rowland-Smith has labored, giving up a two-out double, hitting Kurt Suzuki and throwing 26 pitches. Not the way he wanted to start a game after getting that lead. Remarkably, he's still up by one.
- Don Wakamatsu's not waiting for the big rally. With Jose Lopez at first base, one out and Rob Johnson at the plate, he sent Lopez, who stole his first base of the year. Runner in scoring position, one out. Johnson struck out. Jack Wilson struck out.
- Leading off the third inning, Davis hooks a 2-2 curve down the left field line, tucking just inside the foul pole for his first home run. Tie game at 2-2.
- Daric Barton opened the fourth with a single and, one out later, Travis Buck doubled to right. When Ichiro fumbled the ball into foul territory - his first error of the season - Barton scored all the way from first. That's an unearned run, and Rowland-Smith has thrown 76 pitches in four innings. The bullpen is going to have to work again tonight. Oakland 3, Seattle 2.
- Franklin Gutierrez singled, Seattle's third hit, to start the fifth inning. A wild pitch put him at second base with no one out. Johnson struck out. Wilson singled Gutierrez home with the second hit of the inning. That's the first two-hit inning in 24 this season, but it ties it a 3-3.
- Still in the fifth, Ichiro singled Wilson to third base and the Athletics had an all-infield meeting at the mound. Duchscherer then tried to pick Ichiro off, without success. A Figgins fly to left scored Wilson. Seattle 4, Oakland 3.
- Rowland-Smith is on fumes, having loaded the bases with one out in the fifth inning - two singles and a walk - and Barton's long sacrifice fly to left field was run down by Bradley but got the tying run home. With his 96th pitch, Rowland-Smith got a ground ball out. He's done after five innings. Seattle 4, Oakland 4.
- Two outs into the sixth, no one on, Lopez singled and went to second on a wild pitch. Gutierrez singled up the middle to get him home. Seattle 5, Oakland 4 - and if it stands, Rowland-Smith will be the winner.
- Now pitching, to the horror of sabermetricians everywhere, Sean White.

- In the seventh inning, Brandon League in to protect that one-run lead. A two-out double by Kurt Suzuki tied it at 5.
- Lopez singled with two out in the eighth inning, his third hit of the night, Seattle's eighth. Gutierrez grounded sharply down the left field line, but third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff made a sprawling stop and strong throw to rob him of a double. Seattle 5, Oakland 5.
- League back for the eighth, got pinch-hitter Eric Chavez on a grounder, then gave up back-to-backs singles to the No. 8 and No. 9 hitters in Oakland's lineup. When Davis grounded sharply to Lopez, the third baseman dropped the ball, then stepped on the bag for one out instead of getting two. Wakamatsu brought Mark Lowe in to face Mark Ellis. Both runners advanced on Johnson's passed ball. Ellis struck out, looking. Still tied at 5.
- Two outs into the ninth inning, Ichiro drew a four-pitch walk. Would he run in a tie game to put himself in scoring position? No. Figgins lined out. If the Mariners are to win this one, they'll have to get the game to extra innings first.
- Oakland gets leadoff single from Sweeney in the bottom of the ninth inning. Kouzmanoff bunted, but Lowe threw Sweeney out at second base. Suzuki doubled off the wall in left, driving home the game winner.
- Oakland 6, Seattle 5.

More Lee, more Bedard & a lineup

Posted By Larry Larue on April 7, 2010 at 5:41 pm

The Tacoma News Tribune Blog

Cliff Lee threw off a mound for the first time today 8-10 pitches, depending on you were listening to, will throw a 25-pitch bullpen session Friday and, on the 14th will pitch a simulated game.

"We're going to build his pitch count up in simulated games, then send him out - for one, two games, we just don't know yet," general manager Jack Zduriencik said. "We'll let his progress dictate."

Sidelined since March 12 with a strained abdominal muscle, Lee is coming along faster than the team had hoped, but there's still no return date.

Similarly, Erik Bedard threw a 40-pitch bullpen session this afternoon and is well ahead of his once-June projected return. Whether that holds is another question, but he's throwing well and, like Lee, will soon begin simulated games.

Bedard hasn't pitched since last July, and underwent shoulder surgery in August last year.

Also, for those scoring at home, remove the error charged to third baseman Jose Lopez on Tuesday - it was changed to a hit for Ryan Sweeney by the official scorer, post-game. Lopez hasn't committed an error yet.

That's the Lee-Bedard update. Now, a lineup vs. Oakland:

- Ichiro, RF
- Chone Figgins, 2B
- Casey Kotchman, 1B
- Milton Bradley, LF
- Ken Griffey Jr, DH
- Jose Lopez, 3B
- Franklin Gutierrez, CF
- Rob Johnson, C
- Jack Wilson, SS
- Ryan Rowland-Smith, P

Sweeney hasn't played, but he's working

Posted By Larry Larue on April 7, 2010 at 3:23 pm

The Tacoma News Tribune Blog

Mike Sweeney hasn't stepped out of the Seattle Mariners dugout in two games, despite coming out of spring training as the hottest hitter on the team.

A .500 batting average didn't get him in the lineup against lefty Dallas Braden on Tuesday, when Milton Bradley was the designated hitter and Eric Byrnes played left field.

It may be the Mariners are being cautious with Bradley, who had a tight quad on Sunday. It could be they simply wanted to get Byrnes in a game Tuesday, put Sweeney in against a lefty on Thursday.

That hasn't stopped Sweeney's work off the field.

At the moment, the Mariners bullpen is on the field running pass patterns as conditioning drills and there - in the middle of it all - is Sweeney, wearing a stocking cap, shorts and a huge smile. He's covered pass routes, checked pitchers trying to get off the line and run a deep post pattern or two.

Conditioning - running - is no fun no matter what the circumstance, let alone after a tough game. One wouldn't know that watching Sweeney - or more importantly, hearing him. He has teammates laughing, smiling and working.

It's a small thing in a long season, and Sweeney will get chances to contribute at the plate. Until then, he's being Mike Sweeney - a valuable commodity all by himself

Some lunchtime links to peruse -- Halman on the Rainiers

Posted By Ryan Divish on April 7, 2010 at 12:21 pm

The Tacoma News Tribune Blog

Not going to make excuses for some prolonged absences on here. But hopefully that will change in the near future.

Here's Larry's game story and notebook from yesterday's loss to the A's.

Here's Susan Slusser's story from the SF Chronicle. The M's will face Justin Duchscherer, who returns to the mound for the first time since 2008.

The lack of offense didn't surprise me. It's going to happen at times this season. The lack of a decent approach at the plate from certain hitters was an issue. Rookie Adam Moore saw about pitches total in his four at-bats. And look at this Jose Lopez at-bat with Franklin Gutierrez on first in the ninth inning

"The story comes down to not scoring runs," manager Don Wakamatsu said after the game. "When you get into that situation, you need to manufacture runs and we weren't able to get on base to do with it. We have to be a little more patient and lay off that change-up."

I did like what I saw from Ian Snell (above). Obviously you aren't going to get that type of start from him every outing, but I think he has a better understanding of how to pitch in the AL. And his fastball command has been better than at any point last season.

The Rainiers open the season on Thursday. Yesterday they had banquet for fans and media. Here's a notebook I wrote from there, one thing I failed to mention in there was the sweet, white or cream colored Miami Vice suit

that Halman was wearing with a black t-shirt underneath. I swear I could hear THIS every time he walked by. Marc from USS Mariner even got a picture of it with his iPhone.

Columnist John McGrath also was there and wrote this column about the Rainiers opening the season.

If you are looking for some additional Rainiers info as well some interesting insight. Check out Mike Curto's blog -- Mike ... off Mic. The voice of the Rainiers is posting thoughts, news and plenty of other observations.

The three main blogs -- USS Mariner, Lookout Landing and Proball NW are all doing postgame thoughts posts.

Jon from Proball NW takes a look at the rosters for Class A Clinton and High Desert and offers some notes and thoughts for Lookout Landing.

Elsewhere around the AL West and baseball

The Angels set a Guinness (mmm Guinness) book of world record for most fans wearing snuggies at a game. They also lost the game as well. Torii Hunter is taking Brandon Wood under his wing to help him have success this season.

Tim Lincecum has worn the same hat for every start of his big league career -- That is awesome.

David Ortiz isn't pleased with the Boston media criticizing his hitting after two games

April 7, 2010 at 11:47 AM

Milton Bradley's start not a crisis, but worrisome

Posted by Larry Stone

Seattle Times Blog

Update 7:15 p.m. OK, Bradley just launched a two-run homer in the first inning. That should help considerably. As I wrote, it doesn't take long to turn a slow start into a good start.

I know some people are already concerned about Milton Bradley .

In the big picture, of course, 0-for-7 after two games is completely insignificant. Players in the midst of great seasons have back-to-back hitless games all the time. Justin Morneau, to take one example, started off 0-for-8 after two games last year, and finished with 30 homers and 100 RBI despite missing most of September with an injury.

So struggling in the first two games doesn't mean anything. Just ask Boston's David Ortiz, who lashed out at reporters yesterday after his second straight hitless game. He didn't like it when it was suggested that a slow start by him for the second year in a row could become a big talking point. Here's his response, according to ESPN.com:

"Good," he said, turning to face the reporters encircling him. "You guys wait 'til [expletive] happens, then you can talk [expletive]. Two [expletive] games, and already you [expletives] are going crazy.

"What's up with that, man? [Expletive]. [Expletive] 160 games left. That's a [expletive]. One of you [expletives] got to go ahead and hit for me."

All that said, with Bradley, who has struck out four times in nine plate appearances, and been thrown out stealing after one of his two walks, getting off to a fast start might be more important than the average player. When the Mariners acquired him in December, Cubs GM Jim Hendry and manager Lou Piniella both said they believed that Bradley's subsequent problems in Chicago stemmed from his slow start.

"Bottom line, he got off to such a bad start, and the expectations were so high for all of us, when expectations were not met, and there was criticism in his direction, he didn't handle it well," Hendry said in that December interview.

And Piniella told me in a phone interview I did with him shortly after the trade: " I think getting off to a slow start hurt him. I can surmise that he probably put too much pressure on himself, and things compounded on him."

How slow of a start did Bradley get off to last year? Simply dreadful. On a six-game road trip to start the season, he went 1-for-17, the lone hit coming in Game 4. After 11 games, Bradley's batting average stood at .042 -- 1 for 24. He didn't reach .200 until May 27, and by that time, things had already spiralled out of control for him in Chicago. No need to rehash all that.

I truly believe this is a better situation for Bradley than Chicago, that the dynamics are in place for him to thrive. Whether that happens or not will be critical to the M's success. We're already seeing that the offense is going to be a challenge. As I wrote in a previous post, and as has already become apparent, the Mariners need Bradley's production from the cleanup hole.

Keep in mind, again, Bradley could go out and go 3-for-4 tonight, drive in a few runs, and suddenly a poor start has transformed into a fast start. That's the way a season unfolds. But the longer he goes without getting into the hit column, the greater the concern.

April 7, 2010 at 10:48 PM

A's 6, Mariners 5: bullpen in serious trouble only three games in

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

You don't want to panic about a situation after only three games. And nobody on the Mariners is pushing the panic button just yet.

But it is becoming clear that this six-man bullpen might not be such a great idea. We're three games in and the Mariners were already forced to use Brandon League for 40 pitches tonight. League is not a long reliever and pushing him like that is not a good thing to try very often.

Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu knows this. He doesn't want to push League like that since he's not stretched out to go that deep.

But he's limited. He used Kanekoa Texeira for two innings last night. Shawn Kelley was available tonight but had to be saved in case the game went another inning. And he was the last guy, other than David Aardsma and you don't want to be burning your closer in non-save situations this early unless absolutely necessary.

Kelley was used for one inning last night because the game was tied and the Mariners were hoping they'd score a run to win it. Kelley is a short relief type when the game is tied or the M's are leading.

He becomes a long guy if the M's are getting hammered early. But tonight was a tweener type of game. Ryan Rowland-Smith was bounced after five innings, yet the game was tied because the Mariners actually scored some runs and did plenty of little things right.

Still, you can see the choices Wakamatsu is facing each and every night. The decisions about when and when not to use Kelley -- and how to use him. This is becoming real tough just to keep an extra position player on the

roster. Especially when you know that, without Cliff Lee around, there's a good chance your starter could go six innings or fewer four nights out of five.

"We can't keep going like this," Wakamatsu told me after other reporters had left the room.

He told me that if the M's run into similar trouble tomorrow afternoon, they'll have to call up another bullpen arm.

"It's getting tougher and tougher when you play these close games," Wakamatsu said. "Just trying not to abuse guys and keep guys ready for tomorrow. There are guys you don't want to use and then all of a sudden (Shawn) Kelley's your last guy down there. But it's tough. These guys have done a good job. We're battling and these guys will come out strong (Thursday) again."

The Mariners played a pretty good offensive and defensive game. Milton Bradley hit a two-run homer and saved multiple runs with catches in the first and fifth innings to keep Ryan Rowland-Smith in a position to actually win the contest.

Wakamatsu felt Rowland-Smith was having trouble from the start and never really got in a rhythm. The pitcher felt he was throwing strikes, but couldn't finish a couple of guys off, saw his pitch count run up early, and also got victimized by some bloopers.

Either way, without those catches by Bradley, there are probably three or four more runs against Rowland-Smith than the three earned he was charged with.

The only catch Bradley failed to make was in the ninth inning at the wall on Kurt Suzuki's blast. Looked like the wall might have gotten in the way of a Bradley jump, but who knows? The play was ruled a double.

Bradley didn't want to discuss the play afterwards, telling reporters to: "Make your own assessment."

As for the tough games his former A's club keeps handing the M's, Bradley shrugged and said that's simply the way Oakland plays.

"We'd love to have some cake games," he said. "Some laughs."

But there was little to laugh about after this.

Mark Lowe came on and froze Mark Ellis to end the eighth. But the ninth inning began with a single and then, one out later, the ball to left that eluded Bradley and scored the winning run from first base.

"It was the highest of the highs and the lowest of the lows to end the game," Lowe said with a shrug.

Might get even lower if Doug Fister can't go deep tomorrow.

April 7, 2010 at 9:48 PM

Mariners at Oakland Athletics: April 7, 2010 game thread

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

Brandon League is at 32 pitches with one out in the eighth inning, the score still tied 5-5. The Mariners don't appear to have anyone else warmed up. A lonely feeling to be sure, but that's the reality of this bullpen right now.

9:31 p.m.: Brandon League just blew the save opportunity in the eighth, serving up a tying double with two out to Kurt Suzuki. Mark Ellis had led off with a single and advanced to second on a groundout.

League appeared to be on the verge of escaping when he shattered the bat of Kevin Kouzmanoff for a groundout with the runner holding.

But Suzuki ripped a ball into the left field corner to bring Ellis home to tie things up 5-5.

It could have been worse though. Jack Wilson saved the go-ahead run when he ranged to his left behind the second base bag to snag a ball headed up the middle. Wilson then calmly threw the hitter, Daric Barton, out at first base.

9:01 p.m.: Old pal "WP" came through for the Mariners offense again in the sixth inning. Seattle leads 5-4 after Jose Lopez notched a two-out single, then advanced to second on a wild pitch. Lopez then scored on a single to center by Franklin Gutierrez that ended Justin Duchscherer's night.

That's two wild-pitches leading to Mariners runs tonight. Don't forget, they scored their only run last night on a wild pitch as well.

Sean White now on to pitch.

Rough outing for Ryan Rowland-Smith but he battled to keep it close, got some help from Milton Bradley and is now in line for the win.

8:51 p.m.: Milton Bradley may have just saved the game with that running catch near the left field corner. The way that ball was slicing, if Bradley doesn't make the catch, at least two runs score and probably three. Instead, only one came home on what goes down as a sacrifice fly by Daric Barton.

So, we're tied 4-4 after five and I doubt we see any more of Ryan Rowland-Smith. You saw how desperate the team was to get five innings out of him when they left him in there to face right handed bat Jake Fox with runners at the corners and two out. Now, you can start the next inning with Sean White, who is warmed up and ready.

Rowland-Smith gave up a leadoff single to Mark Ellis, then a one-out single to Kevin Kouzmanoff on an 0-2 pitch. A back-breaker there. He walked Kurt Suzuki on four pitches after that, then fell behind Barton, prompting a mound visit by pitching coach Rick Adair to try to settle him down.

Justin Duchscherer was sent back out there by the A's. A little surprised at that, but he's done OK tonight after the rough first inning.

8:35 p.m.: Jack Wilson hadn't looked like much of an offensive force up to now, having gone 0-for-9 to open the season. But he had the big hit of that fifth inning, a game-tying single up the middle after Franklin Gutierrez opened with a single, then advanced on a wild-pitch. (That WP guy is sure an offensive cog for these M's, isn't he?)

Wilson then went to third on Ichiro's single to right and later scored on a sacrifice fly to left by Chone Figgins.

So, a 4-3 lead for the Mariners as we head to the bottom of the fifth. I said on today's show that Duchscherer would probably only go about five innings since he's coming off a one-year layoff. I doubt we see any more of him tonight.

Now, it's up to Ryan Rowland-Smith to at least get through this fifth inning. Would be nice if he could have a quickie and go even deeper but he at least has to go five and try to hold the lead.

8:23 p.m.: Rajai Davis just did Ryan Rowland-Smith a huge favor, swinging at the first pitch he saw and flying out to end the fourth inning. Rowland-Smith was at 72 pitches with only one out in the fourth, trailing 3-2 after giving up a single, then a double and watching Ichiro make a rare error in right to score the run. The runner was going to hold at third, but Ichiro appeared to simply overrun the ball as he tried to cut it off in the right field corner.

So, a runner on second, one out, a run in and the pitch count escalating.

But then, Rowland-Smith got a groundout to third by Cliff Pennington with the count full. Then Davis swung out of the inning on the next pitch to get Rowland-Smith on to the fifth at 74 pitches. Not great, but a whole lot better than things looked moments ago.

Seattle absolutely needs at least five frames from Rowland-Smith tonight or the bullpen will be in trouble as we move forward -- especially with a day game tomorrow.

Justin Duchsherer has retired nine in a row as we begin the fifth.

8:08 p.m.: Oakland tied it up in the third inning and Ryan Rowland-Smith is in some pitch count trouble. He's at 59 for the night after three innings, seven more than counterpart Justin Duchscherer.

Rajai Davis tied the game in the top of the third, taking a Rowland-Smith pitch over the left field wall to knot the score at 2-2. Ryan Sweeney later hit a one-out single, but Rowland-Smith escaped further trouble on a popout to the shortstop by Kevin Kouzmanoff and a flyout to shallow left by Kurt Suzuki.

But Rowland-Smith certainly has to be economical. This bullpen needs more from him than five innings or fewer tonight.

7:33 p.m.: Ryan Rowland-Smith had some bad luck in the bottom of the first and wound up giving a run back to the A's. Then again, Hyphen got a little lucky on a Kurt Suzuki shot past the third base bag that was ruled foul by an inch or so, or we'd be tied.

It's now 2-1, M's in the lead, after Rajai Davis opened with a bloop single, stole second and advanced to third on a throwing error by catcher Rob Johnson. Ryan Sweeney then blooped one down the left field line that a sliding Milton Bradley made a nice catch on. But the throw wasn't going to be anywhere in time to get the tagging Davis.

Jose Lopez cut the throw off for some reason, even though there was nobody on base.

Not sure what his thinking was on that.

Rowland-Smith didn't do himself any favors after that, giving up a Kevin Kouzmanoff double that rolled to the wall in left, then hitting Suzuki with a pitch. He finally got Daric Barton to fly out to right to end the inning.

In all, he threw 27 pitches.

So, I guess "ding! ding!" We have a winner! Nelson, watching Geoff Baker Live! today, asked me what inning I thought Hyphen would throw his 24th pitch in. I answered that it would likely be the second, but Nelson was insistent that it would come in the first inning. Turns out he was right.

7:05 p.m.: Remember back in spring training when Milton Bradley stunned his former teammate, Justin Duchscherer, by laying down a bunt single? Well, Bradley wasn't playing small ball tonight, ripping a Duchscherer pitch well into the right field seats for a two-run homer that gives Seattle a 2-0 lead.

The inning began well enough for Duchscherer, who retired Ichiro on a flyout to left and Chone Figgins on a groundout to second. But Casey Kotchman drew a key two-out walk and Bradley worked the count to 2-1 in his favor before notching his first hit, extra-base-hit, RBI, run scored and homer of the season on one swing.

That was a 26-pitch inning for Duchscherer. Better job by the Mariners of working the count. Looks like a tight strike zone tonight from plate ump Alfonso Marquez.

7:05 p.m.: Ryan Rowland-Smith makes his season debut tonight, taking on Justin Duchscherer, who hasn't pitched since July 2008. As always in Oakland, plenty of good seats still available. Why don't you just hop on down and join us?

The lineups:

MARINERS

Ichiro RF
Chone Figgins 2B
Casey Kotchman 1B
Milton Bradley LF
Ken Griffey Jr. DH
Jose Lopez 3B
Franklin Gutierrez CF
Rob Johnson C
Jack Wilson SS

Ryan Rowland-Smith LHP

OAKLAND

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

RHP Justin Duchscherer

April 7, 2010 at 5:24 PM

Cliff Lee throws off mound; Mariners looking at April 14 target date for simulated game

Posted by Geoff Baker

Seattle Times Blog

In the video above, you can see Cliff Lee throwing off the top of a mound for the first time since suffering that abdominal strain three weeks ago. Mariners manager Don Wakamatsu said that the team is targetting April 14 as a date for Lee to throw a simulated game.

First, Lee will throw 25 pitches in a bullpen session on Friday. After that, he'll throw a 40-pitch session. The team would then try to get that simulated game in and probably at least one or two others before sending Lee out on a minor league rehabilitation assignment. The goal is to have him throw 70 to 80 pitches by the time he's ready to be activated.

Of course, then the team has his five-game suspension to worry about. I still doubt he sees a major league mound in April.

As you can see in the video, this wasn't a light catch session. Lee was bringing it pretty good. He also threw eight pitches from in front of the mound prior to getting on top of it.

"It was pretty close to max effort," Lee said. "But I feel good."

Lee said he's just going to slowly ease back into pitching. The team is a little concerned he might try to come back too quickly and is closely monitoring his progress.

"We've got to make sure he doesn't get ahead of himself," general manager Jack Zduriencik said. "Because he's a very competitive guy."

April 14 could be a busy time for Lee. It's right around then that he's supposed to have a hearing on the appeal of his five-game suspension for throwing at the head of Chris Snyder in a spring training game against the Diamondbacks.

The Mariners would definitely like to know whether his suspension will be reduced, eliminated or upheld ahead of time so they can plot his recovery course effectively and target the proper date for his return.

Think it's a coincidence that hearing keeps getting rescheduled? I don't. I'm just guessing, but I'm thinking MLB was none-to-happy to learn that the M's were contemplating starting Lee off on the 25-man roster this week so he could serve the suspension. By postponing the hearing -- meaning Lee can't be "suspended" unless he dropped the appeal process -- they eliminated that possibility for the M's.

By continuing to leave the hearing date up in the air, MLB reduces the chance the M's might try to bring Lee back "early" off the DL so he could just sit out games he wouldn't be healthy enough to pitch in any event. Again, that's just me guessing. But how hard is it to co-ordinate a hearing? I manage to do Mitch in the Morning, produce a live webcast, fill blog posts, work out, have breakfast and lunch, respond to (some) email, take care of personal business (I'm leasing a new car) all before leaving for the ballpark. Surely, the good folk at MLB could get a hearing done quicker than this if they put their minds to it? Stay tuned.

That's Erik Bedard in the photo above, throwing his own, 40-pitch bullpen session moments ago as I typed this. Bedard is technically ahead of Lee at this stage, but that doesn't mean he'll return sooner. Lee is still going to come back weeks before Bedard if all goes well. The M's are going to take Bedard's progress very slowly from here so as not to risk a setback.

Shot some video below. It's using a zoom lens from up in the pressbox, so I apologize in advance for the jerkiness of the camera. Best I could do.

By the way, expect to see Mike Sweeney in as the DH tomorrow against lefty Brett Anderson. There's a righty in there tonight, so Sweeney, once again, is on the bench.

The lineups:

MARINERS

Ichiro RF
Chone Figgins 2B
Casey Kotchman 1B
Milton Bradley LF
Ken Griffey Jr. DH
Jose Lopez 3B
Franklin Gutierrez CF
Rob Johnson C
Jack Wilson SS

Ryan Rowland-Smith LHP

OAKLAND

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

RHP Justin Duchscherer

April 7, 2010 at 11:18 AM

What's the "real" Mariners payroll figure? Somewhere around \$93 million

Posted by Geoff Baker
Seattle Times Blog

It's taken a couple of days, but we've gone over those payroll figures supplied by USA Today on Monday and -- as we told you the other day -- they weren't really adding up. The Mariners are clearly spending more than \$86.5 million in payroll this year.

They are also spending far less than the \$98.3 million reported in the Associated Press salary survey the other day. The problem with AP's survey is that it lists Eric Byrnes at \$11.6 million in salary. Well, the M's are only paying Byrnes the bare minimum of \$400,000, because they got him on a waiver claim.

That's a huge discrepancy and throws the numbers off so as to render them meaningless.

We've been saying throughout the pre-season that the M's are in the low 90 millions and after meticulous culling of the figures and making some phone calls, it turns out that's exactly where they still are. Just over the \$93 million mark.

That's a drop of just over \$5 million from where the team began last season.

It reflects that, for accounting purposes, the M's are counting \$4.5 million extra in cash both this year and next that is being paid to the Cubs for Milton Bradley. We'd told you before that the team is paying \$3.5 million this year and \$5.5 million next, but the way MLB makes teams account for this is \$4.5 million each year. It's the same with singing bonuses, which are factored in over the life of a contract.

So, with Bradley, you have a \$9 million base salary plus \$4.5 million, which equals \$13.5 million. USA Today had him at only \$11 million.

USA Today also left off the \$1 million being paid to the Royals for Yuniesky Betancourt. And the \$1 million on the books for the first year of Dustin Ackley's major league contract. Both places have Ichiro at \$18 million when the actual money accounted for is more like \$17 million, as we told you back in January when we first began estimating the payroll.

So, let's run those numbers again.

Ichiro 17,000,000
Milton Bradley 13,500,000
dl-Cliff Lee 9,000,000
Chone Figgins 8,500,000
Felix Hernandez 7,200,000
Jack Wilson 5,600,000
Ian Snell 4,450,000
Casey Kotchman 3,517,500
Jose Lopez 3,000,000
David Aardsma 2,750,000
Ken Griffey Jr. 2,350,000
Franklin Gutierrez 2,312,500
dl-Erik Bedard 1,500,000
Mark Lowe 1,150,000
Brandon League 1,087,500
Dustin Ackley (Major league contract) 1,000,000
Mike Sweeney 650,000
Ryan Langerhans 525,000
Ryan Rowland-Smith 440,000
dl-Jack Hannahan 416,500
Sean White 415,000
Rob Johnson 412,500
Shawn Kelley 412,500
Jason Vargas 412,500
Doug Fister 406,500
Adam Moore 401,000
Matt Tuiasosopo 401,000
Kanekoa Texeira 400,000
Eric Byrnes 400,000

Yuniesky Betancourt salary -- 1,000,000

That brings you to around \$92 million.

After that, you also have to throw in a \$500,000 buyout for Bill Hall, which the Mariners have apparently committed to pay if the Red Sox -- as expected -- don't exercise the option on his contract. You also have the

\$600,000 Jack Wilson buyout from last year, which the team exercised in order to re-write his contract. I've already factored that in to his wage on the chart. So, the added Hall money brings us to roughly \$92.5 million.

After that, you throw in other performance-linked bonuses and such that have to be considered "makeable". I'm told those could add anywhere from a few hundred thousand more to another million more to the equation. So, let's split that and call it just over \$93 million.

We're not counting Erik Bedard in this. Yeah, he could trigger bonuses all the way up to a total take of \$7 million for this year. But he could also not pitch until September. No one will know until he steps on a mound, so it's a safe bet the team hasn't budgeted beyond \$1.5 million in base salary. You have a contingency fund -- all teams do -- for stuff like that. The M's had one last year as well when they opened with a \$99 million payroll. Now, as we've shown you, the payroll is just over \$93 million.

So, there you go. It's safe to say the team has cut payroll by just over \$5 million.

So, what about Jarrod Washburn? I'd guess that if the team has offered him a \$1.5 million base salary, as Scott Boras told AOL Fanhouse last week, then somebody in ownership has agreed to spend additional money.

But right now, it hasn't been spent.

One more thing.

Many of you have written in, longtime poster Donovan being one, to ask whether the Mariners have reversed their previous policy of not taking a profit. In the past, the ownership group has always insisted it pours any profits back into the team.

The answer is: not to my knowledge.

In documents filed with the stadium commission a month ago, the Mariners once again stated there were "no distributions to ownership" from the profit that was declared.

When I wrote a paragraph stating that I was not philosophically opposed to owners taking a profit, it wasn't meant to suggest the Mariners had actually done this. It was meant to sidetrack any potential debate about the ethics of a team actually doing this. As I've stated before, the teams put up the money to a large degree and I believe they are entitled to take a profit from time to time without being raked over the coals for it. Yes, public dollars do finance stadiums and tax breaks, but that's an entirely separate and complex discussion I did not want to get into at this time. Hence the paragraph. But no, I was not implying that the M's had changed their stance. The documents they filed indicate the opposite.

But yes, the team has certainly cut payroll one season after making a profit. We'll see if they make any additional moves from here to add to the team and that money total.

Rainiers announce Team of the Decade

Posted by Gerry Spratt at April 7, 2010 5:03 p.m.

Seattle PI.com Blog

The Tacoma Rainiers have announced their team of the decade, as voted by fans. And it's no surprise that the roster is loaded with familiar faces for Mariners followers.

The Mariners' Triple-A affiliate held online balloting over the past six weeks.

There were a few close races, with Greg Dobbs edging Justin Leone at third base by a 5-percent margin. Asdrubal Cabrera beat Ramon Vazquez by a 6-percent margin at shortstop.

Bucky Jacobsen took 52 percent of the votes at designated hitter, with Juan "The Large Human" Thomas behind him with 38 percent.

Here's the full Team of the Decade roster:

Catcher: Pat Borders (2001-04). The ex-World Series MVP had a six-hit game.

First base: Bryan LaHair (2006-09). Franchise leader in doubles, fifth in home runs.

Second base: Tug Hulett (2008). Hit .298 with 14 home runs in his lone season.

Third base: Greg Dobbs (2004-06). He hit .321 in 2005 and .314 in 2006.

Shortstop: Asdrubal Cabrera (2005-06). Starred in 2005 playoff win over Sacramento.

Left field: Chris Snelling (2003, 2005-06). He hit .370 in 2005.

Center field: Adam Jones (2006-07). Hit .300 with 41 homers over two seasons.

Right field: Shin-Soo Choo (2005-06). Hit .323 with 13 homers before July '06 trade.

Designated hitter: Bucky Jacobsen (2004-05). He hit 26 home runs and had 86 RBI in 81 games in 2004.

Starting pitcher: Felix Hernandez (2005). He made went 9-4, with a 2.25 ERA in 19 starts.

Relief pitcher: George Sherrill (2004-05). He had a 2.30 ERA in 48 games.

Manager: Dan Rohn (2001-05). He won three Pacific Coast League Manager of the Year awards.

The Rainiers open the season at home Thursday at 7 p.m. against the Colorado Springs Sky Sox.

The lineups for tonight's M's-A's game

Posted by Greg Johns at April 7, 2010 4:08 p.m.

Seattle PI.com Blog

The Mariners are hitting .169 and have yet to put two hits together in the same inning through their first two games, but manager Don Wakamatsu isn't about to change up his batting order this early.

Wakamatsu will go back to his Opening Day lineup tonight -- the one designed to face right-handers -- when the Mariners take on Oakland again at 7:07 p.m.

That means Casey Kotchman back in the No. 3 spot, where he racked up four RBIs in the season-opening 5-3 win against right-hander Ben Sheets.

The M's weren't as successful against lefty Dallas Braden on Tuesday in a 2-1 10-inning loss that looked pretty lackluster offensively.

It'll be Justin Duchscherer on the hill for Oakland tonight as the A's trot out another right-hander who -- just like Sheets -- didn't pitch at all last year due to injury.

Seattle counters with Ryan Rowland-Smith. Oakland's only lineup switch is to insert Jake Scott -- acquired this year from the Chicago Cubs -- in at designated hitter in place of Eric Chavez to face the Mariners' southpaw.

Here are tonight's lineups:

MARINERS

Ichiro Suzuki RF

Chone Figgins 2B

Casey Kotchman 1B

Milton Bradley LF
Ken Griffey Jr. DH
Jose Lopez 3B
Franklin Gutierrez CF
Rob Johnson C
Jack Wilson SS

LHP Ryan Rowland-Smith

OAKLAND

Rajai Davis CF
Mark Ellis 2B
Sweeney RB
Kevin Kouzmanoff 3B
Kurt Suzuki C
Daric Barton 1B
Jake Fox DH
Travis Buck LF
Cliff Pennington SS

RHP Justin Duchscherer

Big Unit, Death Cab for Opening Day at Safeco

Posted by Gerry Spratt at April 7, 2010 11:21 a.m.

Seattle PI.com Blog

Randy Johnson will return to Safeco Field on Monday to throw out the first pitch at the Mariners' home opener. And he'll have a tough local act to follow.

Death Cab for Cutie will play a couple of songs at home plate. But they won't possess your heart - a news release from the team said the songs will be baseball-related, but didn't elaborate.

The pregame ceremonies also will include a moment of silence for Officers Tina Griswold, Ronald Owens, Greg Richards, Sgt. Mark Renninger, Deputy Kent Mundell and Officer Timothy Brenton - the Puget Sound-area law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty in the past year.

Ichiro will receive his Gold Glove and Silver Slugger awards. And perhaps the biggest incentive to attend Opening Day - fans will get their 2010 magnet schedule.

Safeco Field gates open at 1:10 p.m. The game against the Oakland Athletics is scheduled to start at 3:40 p.m.

April 7, 2010

How Long With The Six Man Pen?

710 ESPN Seattle's Shannon Drayer

MyNorthwest.com Blog

I think managing a six man pen is going to be a challenge for Wak. He has admitted that his starters are going to have to "suck it up" on occasion because of this. That is good and well if the pitch counts are down but when a guy hits his pitch count regardless of inning he has to come out. Ian Snell threw 100 in six last night. Not bad but RRS following up with 75 through four so far tonight means a good amount of pen is going to be used once again tonight and the four and five starters follow. In Texas.

On a brighter note...Are you getting tired of my daily Lee and Bedard updates? Lee threw again today and is on track to throw a bullpen Friday. When we were out in the dugout watching him warm up I turned to a colleague and told him to watch closely as I was pretty sure he would throw from the mound for the first time today.

Update...RRS in the fifth bases loaded pitch count 90 2 outs bases loaded one run in and he faces a righty. Sucking it up...Gets out of it on a 6-3.

Back to the story. I thought Lee would throw from the mound because of the dry work I saw yesterday. Sure enough he did. For eight minutes. He reported feeling great after and throwing close to 100 percent. Wak says in a best case scenario he will throw a simulated game of two or three innings April 14.

"The challenge is to hold him back a little so we are safe," the skipper said.

The plan is to throw the sim game, take a couple of days off then determine how much time they want him to take on a rehab assignment. They figure they can bring him back on a 75-80 pitch count. Again, won't that require more in the pen?

Bedard threw again today. Wak and Adair are working with him to change his delivery. They want him to eliminate the twist. The thinking is that coming out of the twist he throws across his body cutting the motion off and putting stress on the shoulder. In eliminating it they hope to take pressure off his arm.

I had watched Wak and Adair discuss Bedard's pitching motion after his second bullpen. I asked Wak today how he came to the conclusion that the twisting motion was causing problems.

"Because I had so many troubles myself," he said. "He's had two arm injuries. You ask if is there something in his mechanics. We watched last year and that turn, if it is not just right it puts a lot stress on that shoulder. I think there are times when you ask a guy to do that. We have told him we're looking at longevity. It is not about coming back and getting 15 starts or whatever it is. Let's start making adjustments where that doesn't come back."

The adjustment is a work in progress. In watching him you can tell it is not by any means automatic yet. He threw forty pitches today and Wak reported that his pen looked great.

"He might be almost ahead of Lee in a sense. It is just about how we want to treat that though."

And treat it carefully they will.

Notes...I got a ton of questions about why we haven't seen Mike Sweeney yet. Easy answer. They have been facing righties. Wak's goal was to get Byrnes, Bradley and Sweeney into two of the three games against lefties this road trip. I would count on seeing him in the lineup tomorrow...If you were wondering about the pink backpack, yes the tradition continues. Kanekoa Teixeira is wearing it this season. It is a brand new pink Hello Kitty model. He keeps it well stocked with seeds and corn nuts and seems to be taking the keeper of the pack responsibility very seriously telling me today that he almost bought a pink cap to clip on to the back of it. Teixeira was my guest on Beyond the Baselines today. Told a nice story about his family flying in from Hawaii to watch his major league debut. "My mom couldn't watch and my dad had tears in his eyes when I met him back at the hotel. It was a big day."

Last updated April 7, 2010 9:44 p.m. PT

Wells homers twice in Toronto's 7-4 win at Texas

By STEPHEN HAWKINS
AP SPORTS WRITER

ARLINGTON, Texas -- Vernon Wells is having quite a season-opening homecoming.

Wells homered two more times, Jason Frasor pitched an uneventful ninth after blowing a save on opening day and the Toronto Blue Jays beat the Texas Rangers 7-4 on Wednesday night.

Wells' tiebreaking two-run homer in the fifth put Toronto ahead to stay, and he led off the ninth with another drive.

The longest-tenured Blue Jays player in his 12th season, Wells grew up in Arlington and still lives in the area. This is the first time he has gotten to open a season at home, and he has three homers in the two games.

"It's just trying not to miss your pitches when you get them, that's the biggest thing. So far so good," he said. "There are only 160 more games to go. I don't think I'll keep this pace up."

Still, it's a tremendous start for Wells, who broke his wrist in 2008 and slipped to .260 last season with 15 homers, his lowest total since becoming a full-time big leaguer in 2002. Wells had surgery on the wrist after last season.

Brian Tallet (1-0) allowed four runs, two earned, and four hits in 6 2-3 innings for the Blue Jays. He struck out six and walked three.

Tallet, one of three left-handers in Toronto's rotation, bounced back nicely after allowing homers to Vladimir Guerrero and Nelson Cruz on consecutive pitches in the fourth, tying it at 3.

"It's a moment of reckoning," Tallet said. "You fold and let things slip away or you buckle down."

Rich Harden had an erratic debut for the Rangers, with eight strikeouts and plenty of misses too without getting a decision. The right-hander was done after giving up consecutive bases-loaded walks in the fourth.

"I felt like I had good stuff, but they made me throw a lot of pitches and I lost my command that last inning and that's what hurt me," Harden said. "You end up getting tired, especially with guys on base."

Wells, who scored four times, was hit by a pitch leading off the top of the fourth, then Harden walked a batter and struck out another before third baseman Michael Young's error loaded the bases. After a shallow fly ball, Harden walked the No. 9 batter and another to give Toronto a 3-1 lead.

The Blue Jays led 6-3 midway through the seventh despite only two hits at that time - the homer by Wells off Dustin Nippert (0-1) and a solo shot by Alex Gonzalez that was the only hit allowed by Harden.

Near the end of spring training, hitting coach Dwayne Murphy pulled Wells aside to try an adjustment that got his hands and his weight back more in his stance.

"If I get ready on time, everything else kind of works after that," Wells said. "I can tell if I'm late, I can tell if I'm on time, and just try to be on time as much as possible."

So far, Wells is right on schedule.

After Wells homered in the ninth, his dad, who regularly attends games at Rangers Ballpark, could be seen with a huge smile on his face.

"He did a lot of cussing at the TV last year, he gets a lot more upset than I do when I struggle," Wells said. "I'm glad he has a smile on his face right now."

Kevin Gregg followed Tallet with 1 1-3 perfect innings before Frasor, who gave up two runs in the ninth inning of Toronto's 5-4 loss on Monday, worked around a leadoff double in the ninth to pick up the save.

Harden, who can make as much as \$9 million with the free-agent deal he signed over the winter, walked five.

After Harden walked the game's first batter, he struck out five of the next six until Gonzalez led off the third with a 409-foot homer to left-center.

Nippert walked four in 2 2-3 innings, including Wells in the seventh when Toronto produced a run with two walks, a hit batter and a sacrifice fly by Edwin Encarnacion.

"We walked 10 and hit two, you're not going to win many games doing that," Rangers manager Ron Washington said. "Vernon Wells shows up again. His bat speed looked like it was back so he must be back from the wrist injury."

NOTES: It was Wells' 19th career multihomer game, his first in Arlington. ... Washington says "it'd be a miracle" for 2B Ian Kinsler to play in the season-opening, six-game homestand. Kinsler is on the disabled list for an ankle injury. He has hit, but isn't taking grounders yet. ... Toronto had two errors on one play in the seventh, right fielder Jose Bautista's bobble and shortstop Gonzalez's bad throw after the relay to put runners on second and third. That led to an unearned run when Julio Borbon grounded out.

Last updated April 7, 2010 9:09 p.m. PT

Royals come back to beat Tigers in 11th on error

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- Alberto Callaspo hit a tying homer to lead off the bottom of the 11th inning and pinch runner Willie Bloomquist scored on an error to give the Kansas City Royals a 3-2 win over the Detroit Tigers on Wednesday night.

After Callaspo's shot off Jose Valverde (0-1), Billy Butler singled and Bloomquist ran for him. He stopped at third on Rick Ankiel's double to right-center, but went home when rookie second baseman Scott Sizemore dropped the relay throw.

Miguel Cabrera homered with two out in the ninth inning for the Tigers to tie the score at 1. Carlos Guillen hit an RBI single in the top of the 11th for Detroit.

Cabrera homered off the right-field foul pole with two out in the ninth on a 10-pitch at bat against Joakim Soria.

Kyle Farnsworth (1-0), the fifth Kansas City pitcher, gave up singles to Magglio Ordonez, Cabrera and Guillen to start the 11th.

Luke Hochevar, the first overall pick in the 2006 draft, threw 7 2-3 scoreless innings, holding the Tigers to five hits.

Hochevar, who was 1-10 with an 8.21 earned run average in his final 13 starts last season, gave up five hits, including a wind-blown triple to Austin Jackson with two out in the third. Hochevar struck out Johnny Damon to strand him.

Chris Getz's two-out single to right in the seventh off Fu-Te-Ni scored Yuniesky Betancourt, who singled and went to second when Jason Kendall walked.

Detroit right-hander Max Scherzer held the Royals hitless until Kendall's single to right with two out in the fifth. The Royals loaded the bases in the inning with a hit batter and walk sandwiched around Kendall's single, but came away empty after David DeJesus looked at a called third strike.

Scherzer allowed one hit in six innings.

Cabrera entered the game 8 for 9 with eight consecutive hits off Hochevar, but went 0 for 3 against the right-hander.

Royals starters Zack Greinke and Hochevar have allowed one earned run in 13 2-3 innings in the first two games.

Notes: RHP Gil Meche, who threw 81 pitches in five scoreless innings Tuesday against Royals minor leagues, joined the team Wednesday. Meche, who is on the disabled list with shoulder bursitis, is penciled in to start Sunday against Boston. ... RHP Anthony Lerew, who was designated for assignment Sunday, cleared waivers and accepted an outright assignment to the Royals Triple-A Omaha affiliate. ... RHP Brian Bannister, who starts the Thursday afternoon game, is 17-8 in 32 career day games.

Last updated April 7, 2010 8:33 p.m. PT

Indians rally past White Sox, 5-3

By ANDREW SELIGMAN
AP SPORTS WRITER

CHICAGO -- Fausto Carmona allowed one hit over six wild innings and the Cleveland Indians rallied to beat the Chicago White Sox 5-3 Wednesday night for their first win under manager Manny Acta.

Grady Sizemore drove in two runs, and Matt LaPorta delivered the tiebreaking double in the seventh after the Indians erased an early 3-0 deficit.

Chicago's Jake Peavy struggled through five innings and failed to protect the lead after Paul Konerko delivered a sacrifice fly and his second two-run homer in as many games.

The Indians scored three against Peavy in the fourth to tie it and took the lead in the seventh, when Shin-Soo Choo led off with a single against Randy Williams (0-1) and scored from second when LaPorta doubled to center against Tony Pena. They got another run in the ninth on Andy Marte's bases-loaded grounder to third.

Carmona (1-0) got the win despite walking six on a night when the game-time temperature was 43. Aaron Laffey and Joe Smith then shut down the White Sox before Chris Perez worked the ninth for his first save.

He walked Mark Kotsay with one out before Alex Rios struck out. Marte made a diving stop on A.J. Pierzynski's grounder to end the game.

Peavy had a tough act to follow after Mark Buehrle's season-opening gem and was nowhere near as dominant as he was at the end of last season, when he went 3-0 in September. Instead, the 2007 NL Cy Young winner struggled through five innings, allowing three runs and seven hits while walking two and hitting two batters.

The early lead disappeared when the Indians sent up nine batters in the fourth.

Peavy hit Mike Redmond to load the bases with one out before Michael Brantley singled in a run. Sizemore tied it with a two-out, two run single to right, and Choo walked to reload the bases before Travis Hafner ended the inning with a fly to center.

That rally quieted a crowd that was chanting "Paulie! Paulie!" after Konerko went deep in the third.

NOTES: Andruw Jones will usually play the outfield when he's in the White Sox's lineup rather than serve as the designated hitter, manager Ozzie Guillen said. He's still part of the DH committee, though. "I'm not going to say he's not DH-ing - he might be DH-ing," Guillen said. "But Andruw's in the lineup, why not take advantage of his glove?" A winner of 10 straight Gold Gloves with Atlanta, Jones hasn't started this season. ... Acta said 1B Russell Branyan, out with a bad back, will likely start a rehab assignment with Triple-A Columbus this week. ... Acta wouldn't put the blame on C Lou Marson for Jake Westbrook's club record-tying four wild pitches in the opener. "It's not easy to block pitches in the dirt," Acta said. "It's very unpredictable at times."

Last updated April 7, 2010 7:08 p.m. PT

Longoria homers and has 3 RBIs in Rays' win

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. -- Evan Longoria homered and drove in three runs, Matt Garza allowed two runs over eight innings and the Tampa Bay Rays beat the Baltimore Orioles 4-3 on Wednesday night.

Longoria hit a two-out, two-run double in the fifth to give the Rays a 3-2 lead and added a solo homer in the eighth.

Garza (1-0) struck out nine, walked two and allowing four hits. He improved to 19-9 against AL East teams.

Baltimore's Jeremy Guthrie (0-1) gave up three runs and eight hits in 6 1-3 innings. The right-hander had six strikeouts and two walks.

One day after a season-opening sellout of 36,973, the announced crowd Wednesday night was 15,220.

The Rays opened the season with two wins for the first time since 2002, the only other time they did it.

Rafael Soriano got his first save with the Rays despite allowing a run-scoring double by Garrett Atkins in the ninth.

Miguel Tejada had an RBI single during a two-run first.

Tampa Bay made it 2-1 in the fourth on a run-scoring single by B.J. Upton. The Rays later in the inning loaded the bases with two outs, but the threat ended when Kelly Shoppach struck out.

Orioles second baseman Brian Roberts went 0 for 5 and is hitless in 10 at-bats. He was limited to six games during spring training because of a slightly herniated disc in his back.

NOTES: The Rays are 111-53 at home since the start of the 2008 season. ... Baltimore LF Felix Pie was out of the lineup due to a left rotator cuff strain and was replaced by Nolan Reimold, who is coming back from left Achilles' tendon surgery last September. Pie pinch run in the ninth. ... Orioles INF Robert Andino cleared waivers and was outrighted to Triple-A Norfolk.

Last updated April 7, 2010 5:38 p.m. PT

Pitching rule change confuses Marlins' Nolasco

By HOWIE RUMBERG
AP SPORTS WRITER

NEW YORK -- Marlins starter Ricky Nolasco was charged with a ball Wednesday night when he tried out a new rule that allows pitchers to touch their fingers to their mouths while still on the mound, and got it wrong. Nolasco licked his fingers while standing on the rubber with New York Mets cleanup hitter Mike Jacobs at the plate in the first inning.

A rule change put into effect by the Official Playing Rules Committee this offseason allows a pitcher to go to his mouth on the mound, but not while he is touching the rubber. Previously pitchers were only allowed to touch their fingers to their lips and mouths off the mound, provided they wipe their hand before gripping the ball.

The rule was changed to help speed up the game.

Mets reliever Fernando Nieve was penalized on opening day when he failed to wipe his hand before gripping the ball.

Crew chief Wally Bell explained after the game Monday that pitchers still need to wipe their hands regardless of if they are on the dirt or the grass.

"You can go to your mouth on the dirt - not on the rubber - but you have to wipe," Bell said.

Nolasco did exactly what was not allowed. While on the rubber and looking in to catcher John Baker, he touched his mouth to his hand. Home plate umpire Laz Diaz immediately signaled ball and Nolasco appeared agitated.

Bell, the third base umpire, ran in to explain the call. Florida manager Fredi Gonzalez came out of the dugout to get clarification - and calm his pitcher.

Nieve, who was standing on the grass when he wet his fingers, said Wednesday he was confused by the new rule, which was explained to the players during spring training. New York pitching coach Dan Warthen, however, said Nieve just forgot that he had to wipe off his fingers.

Warthen thinks the rule change will help the pace of game, but not until pitchers adapt their routine to the alteration.

"It should expedite the game, when they start to get the feel for it," Warthen said. "I don't know how incrementally but it should help some."

Last updated April 7, 2010 5:34 p.m. PT

Cubs tickets at Wrigley Field cost most

By RONALD BLUM
AP SPORTS WRITER

NEW YORK -- It's cheaper to sit in much of the lower deck at Yankee Stadium this year, with the Chicago Cubs overtaking New York and Boston for the highest-priced regular tickets in the major leagues.

Overall, the average cost of a non-premium ticket for a major league game is up 1.5 percent to \$26.74, the Team Marketing Report said Wednesday in its annual survey. The rise is the smallest since TMR started tracking baseball tickets in 1991.

The NFL's average last season was \$74.99. In seasons still underway, the NBA is averaging \$48.90 and the NHL \$51.27, TMR said.

Many baseball teams mostly held off on increases following a drop of 6.7 percent in Major League Baseball's average attendance last season, from 32,528 to 30,350.

Tickets at Wrigley Field for non-premium sections average \$52.56 this season and Fenway Park is second at \$52.32 following a 4.1 percent hike.

At Yankee Stadium, where 3,304 lower-deck infield seats without free food were reclassified premium by TMR at the request of the team, the average is \$51.83, up 0.4 percent. Last year's average was adjusted from \$72.97 to \$51.64.

The Yankees cut the price of their \$375 tickets, many of which went unsold last year, to \$300 and in all lowered the cost of 3,400 field level seats.

Their premium ticket average dropped from \$510 to \$312 as 538 seats along the foul lines were reclassified Champions Suite instead of Legends Suite, with ticket holders no longer allowed access to the duplex restaurant behind home plate. The shift left 1,357 seats in the Legends Suite, which cost \$500-\$2,500 last year as part of season tickets and up to \$2,625 for individual games.

This year, the Legends Suite seats cost \$450-\$1,600 for individual games and the Champions Suite \$350-\$550 for individual games.

The Cubs have the second-highest premium average at \$257, followed by the Dodgers at \$222 and Washington at \$193. San Diego has the lowest premium average at \$31.

Minnesota, moving into Target Field, raised its regular average price 45 percent to \$31.47 - the only team other than the Cubs with a double-digit increase.

The Arizona Diamondbacks have the lowest average at \$14.31. The New York Mets cut their average 12.9 percent to \$32.22 following a dreadful first season at Citi Field, San Diego fell 15.4 percent to \$15.15 and Detroit dropped 14.2 percent to \$23.48.

TMR's fan cost index declined 0.6 percent to \$195.08, ranging from \$335 at Fenway Park, \$330 at Wrigley Field and \$316 at Yankee Stadium to \$115 in Arizona. The figure includes two adult tickets at the average price, two child tickets at the average if available, two small draft beers, four small soft drinks, four hot dogs, parking, two programs and two adult caps.

Last updated April 7, 2010 5:28 p.m. PT

Yankees worth \$1.6 billion; Boston 2nd at \$870 mil

By RONALD BLUM
AP SPORTS WRITER

NEW YORK -- The New York Yankees are worth nearly twice as much as any other team in baseball, according to the annual estimates by Forbes magazine.

The Yankees were valued at \$1.6 billion, Forbes said Wednesday, up 7 percent from a \$1.5 billion value last year. The magazine said the team had \$441 million in net revenue in the first season at its new ballpark after paying to baseball's revenue sharing program and financing the stadium.

Boston was next, going up 4 percent to \$870 million and was followed by the New York Mets, who dropped 6 percent to \$858 million following a 70-92 record in their first season at Citi Field. Forbes projected the Mets' stadium revenue will decline by \$20 million this year.

The Los Angeles Dodgers, caught in divorce proceedings of owners Frank and Jamie McCourt, were fourth with a 1 percent increase to \$727 million, \$1 million more than the Chicago Cubs under new owner Tom Ricketts.

Florida, which moves into a new ballpark in 2012, had the largest percentage rise, increasing 15 percent to \$317 million. Minnesota had a 14 percent jump to \$405 million following its move this year to Target Field.

Pittsburgh was last at \$289 million, just below Oakland, which dropped 8 percent to \$295 million. The average worth was up 2 percent to \$491 million.

Florida, at \$144 million, and Pittsburgh at \$145 million were estimated to have the lowest net revenue.

The Marlins had the highest operating profit, Forbes said, at \$46.1 million, followed by Boston at \$40 million. The only teams were operating losses were Detroit at \$29.5 million and Arizona at \$600,000.

Forbes estimated the 30 teams combined for record operating income of \$522 million before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization, an average of \$17.4 million per team.

Texas, in the process of being sold from Tom Hicks to Chuck Greenberg, had the highest estimated debt-to-value ratio, 105 percent, followed by the Yankees (89 percent), Mets (81 percent) and Cubs (80 percent). Minnesota and Toronto were listed with no debt.

On the Net:

[http://<http://www.forbes.com/mlb>](http://www.forbes.com/mlb)

Last updated April 7, 2010 5:17 p.m. PT

A Giant misspelling _ jersey says 'San Francicso'

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOUSTON -- Maybe they left his shirt in "San Fran-cic-so."

A Giant misspelling resulted in outfielder Eugenio Velez wearing a weird jersey Wednesday. A pair of letters were transposed in "Francisco."

So when Velez made his season debut in the seventh inning during a double switch, his uniform read "San Francicso." No one seemed to notice until well after the Giants' 10-4 win over the Astros.

"No, no, I didn't know," he told The Associated Press by cell phone from the team bus on the way to the airport. "That's the first I've heard."

"Incredible!" the Dominican backup said in Spanish.

Velez is in his fourth year with the Giants. He walked and scored the final run against the Astros.

His teammates' jerseys were spelled correctly. The Giants said they would fix Velez's gray uniform before their next road game on April 16 in Los Angeles against the Dodgers.

This was the second year in a row that a major league uniform spelled trouble.

Last April, Adam Dunn and Ryan Zimmerman of the Washington Nationals wore jerseys reading "Natinals" for three innings of a game. The company that made the uniforms apologized for the mistake.

Last updated April 7, 2010 3:33 p.m. PT

Ortiz still in lineup after losing cool

By HOWARD ULMAN
AP SPORTS WRITER

BOSTON -- David Ortiz remained in the Red Sox lineup Wednesday night after losing his cool just two hitless games into the season.

The designated hitter was in the fifth spot against the New York Yankees after going 0 for 7 and leaving three runners in scoring position.

After Boston lost 6-4 Tuesday night, Ortiz initially declined to talk with reporters. He then reacted to a question about his poor start.

"What's up with that, man?" he said. In an expletive-filled tirade, the slugger said there were still 160 games left.

Before Wednesday's game, manager Terry Francona reacted calmly to his star's remarks.

"Sometimes guys get touchy after a game," he said. "That's why I don't normally pay much attention to it."

Last season, Ortiz had one homer, 21 RBIs and a .188 batting average in his first 49 games. Then from June 6 to the end of the regular season, he led the AL with 27 homers, tied for the league lead with 78 RBIs and hit .266. But he finished at .238, and his 28 homers and 99 RBIs were the second fewest in his first seven seasons with Boston.

"He's done a lot of good things here and I think he felt like maybe some people bailed on him last year," Francona said.

The left-handed hitting Ortiz has done much better against righty pitchers, hitting .290 for his career against them compared with .261 against lefties. In 2009, he batted .250 against righties and .212 against lefties.

But going into Wednesday night's game, he had a .367 career average in 49 at bats against lefty Andy Pettitte, New York's starter. Francona went with Ortiz over righty Mike Lowell, was hitting .345 in 29 at bats against Pettitte.

"We want (players) to walk up (to bat) and feel confident. I don't want David looking over his shoulder," Francona said.