

## A's News Clips, Friday, April 16, 2010

### Ben Sheets pays off for Oakland Athletics against Baltimore Orioles

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

Precisely one month from what was surely the ugliest outing of his pitching life, Ben Sheets not only recorded his first victory with the A's but also his first major league win since Sept. 6, 2008.

On Thursday night, Sheets looked another step closer to his former four-time All-Star self in a 6-2 A's victory over the Baltimore Orioles at the Oakland Coliseum.

Back on March 15, Sheets faced 10 Cincinnati Reds hitters in a spring training game, surrendered eight hits, didn't record an out and all 10 runners ultimately scored. At the time, some may have questioned the wisdom of the A's \$10 million offseason investment.

Consider that nightmare performance irrelevant history now.

Sheets, who missed the entire 2009 season after elbow surgery, has pitched solidly since that March 15 debacle. He allowed just one earned run in each of his final two spring appearances and followed up by allowing two earned runs in his opening night start and three in his second outing, both no-decisions.

"I was just setting 'em up, man," Sheets, 31, said with a grin. "Hey, those things happen. Pitchers have bad outings. My whole spring was skewed by that outing. I could have dominated every other game and my numbers still wouldn't have looked good, but I thought I threw the ball fine in spring."

He's throwing it even better now. This latest effort was yet another step forward for the veteran right-hander. Backed by early run support, as well as

some superb defensive work from center fielder Rajai Davis and third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff, Sheets navigated his way through six scoreless innings. He allowed five hits and three walks and struck out four against the Orioles, now owners of baseball's worst record at 1-9 and losers of seven straight as they opened a 10-game road trip.

After giving up a one-out double to Adam Jones in the top of the first, Sheets seemed buoyed when Davis made a full-speed snare of Nick Markakis' shot into the left-center gap, and Kouzmanoff subsequently speared Miguel Tejada's hot liner that appeared headed for the left-field corner and extra bases.

"Those were such big pick-me-ups," Sheets said. "Those kinds of plays kind of go unnoticed in a box score but they're fantastic plays. We could have been behind in the first, and instead, we take it 0-0 (to the bottom half of the inning) and we score two."

In the fifth, Sheets was aided again by Davis, who made a diving catch of Felix Pie's one-out sinking fly ball with a runner on first. Sheets closed his 97-pitch night by escaping a two-out, bases-loaded situation in the sixth, retiring Garrett Atkins on a lazy fly to center.

Both Sheets and manager Bob Geren concurred that while this latest performance was significant, there is still considerable room for improvement.

"The best thing about him is that he should continue to get better after missing a year," Geren said.

Sheets said the two major improvements he made in this latest start was keeping the ball down and being able to throw his breaking pitches effectively at any point in the count.

"I'm still walking people, and I'm not used to walking people," he said. "But the more I get out there and the more comfortable I become throwing pitches in certain counts and making all my pitches, the better I'll be. I just want to keep up in games right now and get better the whole way."

So what's the next goal?

"I'm used to having more clean innings, 1-2-3 innings, and I haven't had many of them," he said. "I want to have some shorter innings and get deeper in the game. Eventually, I'd like to be going seven, eight, nine innings."

On this night, Tyson Ross and Jerry Blevins backed Sheets' scoreless effort over the final three innings.

Offensively, the A's quickly celebrated their return home from Seattle, where they had just six runs and 13 hits over three games, with two runs in the first and single runs in the second, fourth, fifth and eighth.

TODAY: Orioles (Kevin Millwood 0-1) at A's (Dallas Braden 1-0), 7:05 p.m. TV: CSNCA+. Radio: 860-AM; 1640-AM

## **A's update: Baltimore Orioles' Miguel Tejada enjoys return trip to Oakland**

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

Orioles' Tejada enjoys return trip to Oakland

Even though he's been gone for seven years and he knows only a few players on the A's now, Miguel Tejada never tires of coming back to Oakland.

"I have a lot of feelings for the city," said Tejada, now in his second tour of duty with the Baltimore Orioles. "This is where I started my career, and I have a lot of good memories here."

It's been awhile, too. Tejada hasn't played at the Oakland Coliseum since early September 2006. He spent the past two seasons with Houston in the National League and was on the disabled list when Baltimore came to town in 2007.

"The only A's players I know now are Chavvy (Eric Chavez), (Mark) Ellis and Duchy (Justin Duchscherer)," he said. "They have the same situation we have in Baltimore — a lot of new, young players."

Tejada was on the free-agent market until late January and ultimately signed a one-year, \$6 million contract with the Orioles.

Back in Baltimore, Tejada is grappling with a new challenge — playing third base. After 1,846 games at shortstop during the first 12 years of his major league career, he's reluctantly made the switch. The early going has been rough — he made five errors in 20 exhibition games and two more in the first nine regular-season games.

"I love shortstop," he said. "But I love playing baseball more. I think for my career, it's better for me to move now."

His defensive move hasn't affected his hitting. He leads Baltimore with two homers and seven RBIs and is just 13 homers shy of 300 for his career.

Right-handed reliever Michael Wuertz, on the disabled list with shoulder tendinitis, is scheduled to make a rehab appearance tonight in Triple-A Sacramento. "His last bullpen session went very well, and he feels like he's ready to go," manager Bob Geren said. "When he's ready, he'll be a big addition because obviously he was one of the best eighth-inning guys in baseball last year."

The A's announced a two-year extension of their contract with the Class A Stockton Ports through the 2014 season. Oakland moved from Modesto to Stockton in 2005 after the opening of the city's Banner Island Ballpark.

## **Sheets gets first notch in win column since '08**

Steve Kroner, Chronicle Staff Writer

Ben Sheets picked up his first victory in more than a year Thursday night at the Coliseum.

As encouraged as Sheets and the A's must be after Oakland's 6-2 dusting of the Orioles, consider how discouraged Baltimore must be. The Orioles have to lead the American League in discouragement.

Put it this way: Sheets has as many wins this season as do the Orioles.

Baltimore's losing streak reached seven games and the Orioles fell to 1-9 after Sheets tossed six shutout innings. He allowed five hits, struck out four and walked three.

Sheets missed all of the 2009 season after elbow surgery. There were moments last year when he thought he might not get another major-league win.

"I'm sure there were times that it seemed like it might be just easier to hang 'em up," Sheets said, "but you still go to rehab and you still go to work and you still put in your effort to give yourself the opportunity to enjoy something like this."

He hadn't enjoyed a personal "W" since Sept. 6, 2008, when he threw a five-hit shutout for Milwaukee against San Diego.

On Thursday, the Orioles had runners in scoring position in four of Sheets' six innings. He had only one three-up, three-down breeze.

"It's not always pretty and it's not going to be pretty," Sheets said. "I'm used to having more clean innings, 1-2-3 innings. I haven't had many of them."

The A's defense backed Sheets with two fine plays: Third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff's backhand, diving grab of Miguel Tejada's liner ended the first inning and saved a run. In the fifth, center fielder Rajai Davis robbed Felix Pie of a hit with a backhand, sliding catch.

As for the Orioles' futility for the first week and a half, try:

- 1) They've been outscored 55-29.
- 2) After going 0-for-8 with runners in scoring position Thursday night, they're 10-for-74 (.135).
- 3) And with runners in scoring position and two outs, they're 1-for-36 this season after going 0-for-5 in such instances Thursday.

Baltimore starter David Hernandez, who went to Cosumnes River College in Sacramento, took the loss. He gave up five runs (four earned) on seven hits in five innings.

Hernandez beat the A's on Aug. 11. Since then, he's 0-8 and the Orioles have lost all 11 of his starts.

The A's managed all of six runs and 13 hits while losing two of three in Seattle, Monday through Wednesday. They got their offense going early Thursday night.

They scored twice in the first and once in the second. Davis, who went hitless at Safeco Field, was instrumental in both of those innings. He led off the first with an infield single and would score on Ryan Sweeney's grounder to second.

In the second, Davis delivered an RBI single to left. Just like that, he had his fifth multihit game of 2010.

## **Robinson still inspires**

Steve Kroner, Chronicle Staff Writer

Throughout the majors Thursday, the operative number was 42. Players, coaches, managers and umpires all wore 42 as a tribute to **Jackie Robinson**.

He broke the big leagues' color barrier with the Brooklyn Dodgers on April 15, 1947. Sixty-three years later, Robinson's courage and accomplishments still resonate.

"It's an inspiration to all of us," A's center fielder **Rajai Davis** said. "If he can do it under those conditions - and do well - who wouldn't that encourage? Who wouldn't that inspire?"

"Regardless of what you're going through, it's nothing compared to what he went through."

Approximately 500 students, teachers and parents from Northern California schools attended Thursday night's game at the Coliseum as a reward for their participation in the Jackie Robinson "Breaking Barriers" essay contest.

**Owning the O's:** Speaking of numbers, the A's have had Baltimore's for more than a decade. Beginning with the 1999 season, Oakland has a 66-28 record against the Orioles. The A's haven't lost a season series to Baltimore since 1998. They went a combined 10-1 against the O's in 2008 and '09, including a 6-0 mark at the Coliseum.

**Briefly:** The A's announced a two-year extension of their player-development contract with the Stockton Ports of the California League. That means the A's Class A team will remain in Stockton through the 2014 season. ... **Daric Barton**, who doubled twice Thursday night, has reached base via a hit or a walk in each of the A's 11 games. ... **Ryan Sweeney** doubled in the fifth inning to extend his season-opening hitting streak to 10 games. Sweeney did not play Wednesday night in Seattle. ... **Mark Ellis** (hamstring) remained out of the lineup Thursday night. He did not play in the three-game series at Seattle. Manager **Bob Geren** said Ellis is improving but Geren didn't specify when he expects Ellis to return.

## **A's leading off**

Steve Kroner, San Francisco Chronicle, 4/16/2010

**Without a pause:** The A's are beginning the season by playing on 14 consecutive days, the longest such streak in the majors this year. It's also the longest season-opening streak for Oakland since going 16 days to start 1991. The A's first day off this season is Monday.

## **Sheets dominates as A's stifle Orioles**

## **Five players drive in runs as righty earns first win with Oakland**

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- It was still some three hours before the first pitch Thursday night, and A's right-hander Ben Sheets had his game face on.

The game was Nerf basketball, and Sheets, wearing his Golden State Warriors shorts, was sinking 20-foot shots through a plastic hoop taped next to his locker -- and savoring every basket.

Sheets hardly looked like a pitcher searching for his first win with his new team, and first win, period, since Sept. 6, 2008 -- when he pitched for the Milwaukee Brewers and beat the Padres.

Sheets, who missed the entire 2009 season after undergoing elbow surgery that February, looked as if he was coming off a 20-win season and had never spent time in a hospital room.

Then he took that no-worries attitude to the mound and pitched six scoreless innings against the Baltimore Orioles, leading the A's to a 6-2 victory.

Sheets, who signed a one-year, \$10 million deal with the A's this offseason, allowed just five hits. He struck out four and walked three, picking up his first win after two no-decisions.

"Felt good," Sheets said. "It's good to be a part of a victory. First one I've been a part of this year, so I'm excited."

Asked if there were times last year when he wondered if he'd ever win another game in the Major Leagues, Sheets initially responded with a joke and a laugh, before turning serious.

"I don't remember last year," he said. "I'm sure there was. I'm sure there were some times that it seemed it might just be easier to hang them up. But you still go to rehab, you still go to work and ... give yourself an opportunity to enjoy something like this."

In his first two starts this season, Sheets allowed a combined 14 hits and six runs -- five of them earned. He walked seven and struck out only four. Thursday night's performance was a definite step in the right direction.

"I think he'll keep getting better," said A's manager Bob Geren. "I do. He's a four-time All-Star. He had a surgery and he missed an entire year. It's like anybody. If you see him getting better, getting closer to his All-Star-caliber self, then it's encouraging. Six scoreless innings. You can't do a lot better. I guess nine, seven, eight."

The A's gave Sheets plenty of support in the opener of the four-game series, scoring twice in the first inning and one run each in the second, fourth and fifth against Orioles starter David Hernandez.

Ryan Sweeney extended his hitting streak to 10 games with a double in the fifth inning and Daric Barton stayed hot with two doubles against Baltimore, which lost its sixth straight game and fell to 1-9.

Adam Rosales, starting his fourth straight game for injured second baseman Mark Ellis, had two hits, including a fourth-inning double, and scored a run. Designated hitter Eric Chavez went 1-for-3 with a double, an RBI and a run scored.

Rajai Davis ended an 0-for-13 skid with a leadoff single in the first and went 2-for-5, and shortstop Cliff Pennington had a run-scoring double.

"Baseball's all about bouncing back, coming together as a team," Rosales said. "You're going to get knocked down a lot. You've got to get back up. We've been staying strong together."

The A's played plenty of stellar defense behind Sheets, too. In the first inning, with one out and Adam Jones on second after a double, Nick Markakis smoked a drive to left-center. Davis got a great jump on the ball and made a running catch. Moments later, third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff made a diving catch of Miguel Tejada's liner down the third-base line. Later in the game, Davis made a diving snare of his own.

"They were fantastic," Sheets said. "Those are such big pick-me-ups, just to get you in a rhythm. Kouzmanoff's play, Rajai made some great plays. We could have been behind in the first. Instead we take a 0-0 and then we score two."

Sheets pitched his way out of a bases-loaded jam in the sixth after giving up a leadoff double to Markakis and walking two Orioles with two outs. Then, with a 1-1 count, Sheets unleashed a 93-mph fastball that Garrett Atkins sent to Davis in center for the third out.

"Hasn't been easy, and it's not going to be easy," Sheets said. "I'm happy with what's gone on so far. I'm competing out there. It's not always pretty and it's not going to be pretty. I'm used to having more clean innings, one-two-three innings. I haven't had many of them."

## **Chavez still adjusting to DH role**

### **Former third baseman understands move is best for health**

Eric Gilmore, mlb.com, 4/16/2010

OAKLAND -- As a six-time Gold Glove third baseman, Eric Chavez is still getting used to his new job as a designated hitter, one that has so much down time between at-bats.

"The first couple times I did it, I wanted to stay in the dugout and be kind of in the groove of the game," Chavez said before Thursday night's game against Baltimore. "But then I just started to figure out I've got to relax and move around. A few times I've come back up to the cage and made sure I'm loose, but for the most part I just really try to be in the groove of the game. It's just a different routine."

Chavez spent most of Spring Training playing first base. He didn't learn until a day before the season began that he would be a designated hitter.

"It's been good for me, to be honest with you," said Chavez, who took a .200 average into Thursday night's game. "My mindset is that it's a necessity, pretty much. This is something I need to do or else my body's not going to hold up. So I kind of look at it differently. While I wish I was really out there, I know this is the best thing for me."

Chavez underwent season-ending surgery last season for the third straight year, appearing in just eight games.

With self-preservation in mind, the left-handed-hitting Chavez said he doesn't mind sharing the DH job with Jake Fox -- who homered Wednesday against Seattle -- and sitting most nights when the A's face a left-hander.

"It's good with me, and good for me," said Chavez, who started Thursday night against Orioles right-hander David Hernandez. "As we saw [Wednesday], Jake can really swing the bat. We need both of us to kind of get rolling. The best situation is if we're both playing. That means we're both doing our jobs and being productive.

"Those times when we do face lefties, they'll be the necessary days off for me to kind of recuperate. Do I want to be playing? Yeah. Is this the best situation for me? Yeah. That's really the way I view it."

## **Davis chasing stolen base crown**

OAKLAND -- Weeks before he reported for Spring Training, A's speedster Rajai Davis said he expected to lead the American League in steals this season.

The center fielder is off to a fast start.

Despite struggling at the plate, Davis entered Thursday night's game with five steals in five attempts, second in the A.L. and just one behind Kansas City's Scott Podsednik, the Major League leader.

"It's something I would love to accomplish," Davis said. "It's something that's great. It's just a goal. You have to have some type of goal, some type of target to do anything. I just believe everything's going to work out. I'm just thankful I have the opportunity to play."

Last season Davis stole 41 bases and was caught 12 times. Despite his five-for-five start, he said he can get better at reading pitchers and getting jumps.

"I'm trying to get better every day," Davis said. "As long as I can get better every day, who knows what I'm capable of doing."

## **Rosales continues to start for Ellis**

OAKLAND -- A's second baseman Mark Ellis, who's battling a sore left hamstring, missed his fourth straight start.

"He's very close," said manager Bob Geren. "He's feeling better each day, but not quite ready today."

Geren said it was "possible, but not probable" that Ellis could be available to pinch-hit Thursday night.

Meanwhile, Adam Rosales made his fourth straight start in his place. He entered the game hitting .364 with one home run and four RBIs.

"I like what he does," Geren said. "He sparked us in Anaheim with the big home run. He's made some real nice plays. He's done a nice job. He's a real valuable player because he can do so many things."

Right-hander Trevor Cahill played catch and will throw a 45-pitch bullpen session today as he continues his comeback from a sore left shoulder. He's scheduled to make a 60-pitch rehab start Monday for Triple-A Sacramento.

Cahill said he initially hurt his shoulder late last season while lifting weights, and aggravated it while pitching during Spring Training.

"It's pretty much all gone," he said of the pain. "I'm just trying to get my arm back in shape."

After missing his first game of the season Wednesday against Seattle, right fielder Ryan Sweeney returned to the starting lineup on Thursday.

## **A's, O's celebrate Jackie Robinson Day**

### **Players, managers recognize legend's significance to game**

By Eric Gilmore / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- When the A's arrived for work Thursday afternoon before their game against Baltimore, they saw No. 42 game jerseys -- the number Jackie Robinson wore as a Brooklyn Dodger -- hanging in every locker, from one end of their clubhouse to the other.

Teams throughout Major League Baseball celebrated the 63rd anniversary of Robinson breaking the color barrier as a member of the Dodgers. Players, managers, coaches and umpires honored Robinson by wearing his No. 42.

"I think it's phenomenal," said A's designated hitter Eric Chavez. "Obviously, what Jackie did for a lot of us, just the game in general -- kind of exuding that spirit of freedom and just gutting through a tough situation, for all of us, really. Just kind of climbing that mountain, it's a lesson that we all can learn.

"I'm glad baseball is able to look back and appreciate where our game has come from and the guys who really got us to this point."

A's outfielder Rajai Davis said he remembers reading about Robinson when he was in grade school.

"It's an honor for one of the first guys who revolutionized baseball, as far as his play and his willingness to do what few were willing to do at that time, considering the circumstances," Davis said. "It is extremely remarkable what he was able to accomplish at that time, obviously with all the issues going on at that time within the United States.

"For him to not only have success, but to thrive in those pressure situations, is extremely remarkable. It's outstanding."

As part of the celebration, nearly 500 Bay Area elementary and middle school students, as well as their parents and teachers, attended the game as guests of the A's for their participation in the Jackie Robinson "Breaking Barriers Essay Contest."

"I think Jackie Robinson Day is a celebration of Major League Baseball, and it's a way to honor one of the game's greatest players," said Orioles outfielder Adam Jones. "He wasn't just a guy who broke into baseball and broke through the color barrier. He was actually a pretty good player. And it's good that Major League Baseball has shown that they really appreciate everything he brought to the game of baseball."

Orioles manager Dave Trembley called Robinson "a part of this game, and a part of history in our nation."

"What he did to pave the way, to make the game what it is today, is to the benefit of everyone who plays this game and who participates in this game," Trembley said.

"I don't think it's particularly pertinent to race, color or creed. That's the significance of someone who is a giant among giants. That's what Jackie Robinson is."

## **A's strike out at the gate while Cats thrive at Raley**

Marcos Breton, Sacramento Bee, 4/16/2010

OAKLAND – Minor league teams aren't supposed to draw bigger crowds than their parent clubs, but it's going to happen tonight at Raley Field.

The River Cats undoubtedly will play their home opener before an enthusiastic throng the A's would envy on many nights. There is often more excitement at the Triple-A park along the Sacramento River than there is at the outdated mausoleum known as the Oakland Coliseum.

This phenomenon has played out gradually over the last decade, but it's growing increasingly common. Subtract the A's annual home opener – and games against the Yankees, Red Sox and Giants – and the crowd comparisons to Raley Field can get embarrassing.

Here we were on a chilly Thursday night of an alleged big-league game featuring the A's and the woeful Baltimore Orioles – and there were all those empty green seats. You could hear individual voices of some of the louder "crowd" members in "attendance."

Is this really big league?

All River Cats pass through Sacramento with the dream of reaching the big leagues. But the East Bay version of the big leagues is a nightmare for the only World Series winners that Northern California has ever known.

The dreary scene here Thursday is emblematic of an A's franchise for which Oakland is home and yet is homeless.

The team wants to move to San Jose but can't for now because the Giants object, citing their territorial rights. Commissioner Bud Selig is studying the issue, making no promises. In the meantime, the A's are stuck in a football stadium, playing before an aging fan base soured by the A's desire to be elsewhere.

You think Sacramento has a failed history of building an arena for the Kings? Sacramento doesn't know real futility. Here, they've not only had failed attempts to build a new A's ballpark, they have the sour reality that Oakland turned its back on the family-friendly A's and sold itself out for the wretched Raiders.

To make it happen, a ridiculous mountain of football seats was built beyond the center-field fence to entice the Raiders.

Lost were the gorgeous view of the Oakland hills and the best bleachers in the American League.

That was in 1995, and it's been a steady decline ever since. The A's used to outdraw the Giants. Then the strike of 1994 coincided with the demise of the great A's teams of the early 1990s.

Gregg Lukenbill's audacious stab at bringing the A's to Sacramento failed.

The late Mayor Joe Serna once posed for a picture at the downtown railyard in a green-and-gold hat.

It was clear he wanted the A's in Sactown. But Sacramento couldn't secure financing for a stadium, the Raiders returned, and the Giants moved into their gleaming stadium.

While the Giants assert territorial rights, there is nothing doing in Oakland. In the A's first four games against Seattle, they twice drew fewer than 14,014 (the River Cats' capacity).

Against the Orioles, they drew an announced crowd of 17,382.

After three consecutive losing seasons, the A's are winning again.

But if games are won before empty seats, do they really matter?



## **Sheets wins for first time since '08**

ASSOCIATED PRESS

OAKLAND — Ben Sheets pounded the strike zone like his old aggressive self and finally commanded his fastball, winning for the first time since September 2008 in the Athletics' 6-2 victory over the Baltimore Orioles on Thursday night.

Sheets (1-0), who missed all of 2009 recovering from elbow surgery, pitched six scoreless innings and made good for the first time on general manager Billy Beane's bold offseason move of giving him \$10 million to be the A's new ace. Beane believed Sheets could return to the form that has made him a four-time All-Star.

The 31-year-old right-hander gave up five hits, struck out four and walked three to win for the first time since a five-hit shutout of San Diego on Sept. 6, 2008, while with Milwaukee.

Oakland gave Sheets a one-year contract in January, 11 months after his elbow surgery.

Ryan Sweeney had an RBI groundout and a fifth-inning double to give him a 10-game hitting streak to start the season and Kevin Kouzmanoff and Eric Chavez each hit sacrifice flies for the A's, who got back on track offensively. Cliff Pennington drove in a pair of runs.

Oakland managed only two runs total in its previous two losses in Seattle after winning the series opener against the Mariners 4-0 on Monday at Safeco Field.

Baltimore couldn't do much against Sheets and lost its seventh straight.

At 1-9, the Orioles are off to the club's worst start since going 0-21 in 1988 before finally getting a win. They kicked off a tough 10-game road trip with another demoralizing defeat — perhaps the highlight was a warm ovation for Miguel Tejada from his former fans in the Bay Area, where he won the 2002 AL MVP award.

Nick Markakis hit a sacrifice fly to center in the seventh for the Orioles' first run, then Adam Jones added an RBI triple off Jerry Blevins with two outs in the ninth.

Baltimore starter David Hernandez (0-2) allowed seven hits and five runs — four earned — in five innings, struck out six and walked one.

Injured Baltimore second baseman Brian Roberts, placed on the 15-day disabled list Monday with a strained abdominal muscle that also has re-aggravated a herniated disk in his back, is scheduled to be examined by spine specialist Dr. Lee Riley on Friday in Baltimore. Roberts received an epidural injection Monday.

Notes

Oakland won the season series last year 5-1, sweeping three at the Coliseum.

With Orioles closer Mike Gonzalez on the disabled list because of a strained left shoulder, manager Dave Trembley expects RHP Jim Johnson to pick up much of the load in save situations. He also will make decisions based on matchups.

A's 2B Mark Ellis, nursing a strained hamstring, took grounder and batting practice. "He's close," Manager Bob Geren said. "He's feeling better each day."

The A's extended their contract with the Class A Stockton Ports through the 2014 season.

## **Oakland: Sports Boomtown Going Bust**

By [Art Spander](#), realsports.com

OAKLAND - Never thought of this place as the city where dreams go to die.

Battered metaphorically as the poor sibling of San Francisco across the bay - "There's no there, there," said local girl Gertrude Stein - Oakland for a long while survived on its championship teams.

all changed. The Athletics have started the season decently, but every forecast has them finishing at the bottom of American League West.

The Warriors missed the NBA playoffs for the 15th time in 16 years, even though their coach, Don Nelson, didn't miss overtaking Lenny Wilkens for the most career victories.

The Raiders had a seventh consecutive season of at least 11 defeats, and then Thursday signed Kyle Boller, a quarterback who in consecutive seasons was dropped by the Ravens and then the Rams.

Off the field, the Athletics are trying to move their home to San Jose, a 40-mile shift opposed by the San Francisco Giants who claim that burg as territory ceded them by baseball when the A's came west in 1968.

The Warriors also may be moving, to San Francisco, after supposedly being bought by the Oracle software billionaire Larry Ellison.

The Raiders aren't going anywhere, which could be a blessing or a curse. Raider Nation, as it bills itself, has not only been very angry but very inattentive, staying away either in disgust or distress.

Instability is a very large part of life in Nor Cal, certainly, what with the Hayward Earthquake Fault running along the East Bay hills and the San Andreas Fault underlying San Francisco.

So is franchise dysfunction. The A's, owned by Lew Wolff, Bud Selig's frat bro at Wisconsin, cover the upper deck seats at McAfee Coliseum, apparently trying to fool people into believing they don't exist. The seats that is, not the people.

The Warriors make use of their seats, despite their lack of success. Either the public doesn't know any better or doesn't care, but attendance at Oracle Arena, which holds 19,595, averaged around 18,000. Now that's loyalty. Particularly when half the roster was fleshed out of the Development League because of injuries.

How loyal Larry Ellison might feel toward Don Nelson, assuming Ellison's rumored purchase of the W's occurs this summer, is a legitimate question. Nellie has one more year on his contract and is due \$6 million. He might get fired, but he's not going to quit.

Neither is Al Davis, the man in charge of the Raiders. Now three months from his 48th season with Oakland and his 81st birthday, Al continues his maneuvering, the acquisition of Boller making some wonder once more about Al's thought process.

Three years ago, with the first pick in the draft, the Raiders selected quarterback JaMarcus Russell, who was beaten out last season by Bruce Gradkowski. Now on comes Boller, who played collegiately at Cal, a few miles up the road from the Raiders complex.

Boller also was a first-rounder, in 2003 the 19th overall selection, by Baltimore, where for five seasons he was tantalizingly inconsistent and in a sixth was out with a shoulder injury. That the Ravens found it imperative to bring in Steve McNair to compete with Boller makes one wonder.

But now Boller, at age 28, is being brought in to compete with Russell and Gradkowski, a jigsaw puzzle proposition if one ever existed. It would be just like the Raiders to pick yet another quarterback in next week's draft.

The Raiders reportedly wanted Donovan McNabb from the Eagles, but he refused to come to Oakland and was traded to the Redskins. So a team that once acquired Jeff George now reaches out to Kyle Boller.

And now you know why the home folk refer to California as "The State of Confusion."

The A's always appear to be in a very confused state. Billy Beane, the GM, the hero of "Moneyball," has a budget not much larger than that of the average 10-year-old. He tries everything other than asking for bailout money but continually is obligated to trade away talent that he knows would be lost through free agency.

Beane got Matt Holiday a year ago and then after a few months got him off to the St. Louis Cardinals. This season the man in the temporary spotlight is pitcher Ben Sheets, signed for \$10 million, which guarantees his departure is inevitable, especially after his performance Thursday night against Baltimore in which he allowed no runs in six innings.

The A's most of all suffer from ballpark envy. They have this stadium, the Coliseum, commandeered by the Raiders and always compared to that charming place on the water the Giants call home.

Where did it all go wrong?

## **MINOR LEAGUE NEWS**

### **Rainiers Hold On For Win Over Sacramento**

Tacoma, **WA** – The Tacoma Rainiers escaped with a 2-1 win over Sacramento at Cheney Stadium on Thursday.

Outfielder Greg Halman grounded into a force out in the bottom of the fifth inning that was enough to drive in infielders Matt Mangini and Chris Woodward and give the Rainiers just enough offense to collect their first victory over the River Cats in the series.

Tacoma ended their three-game skid despite tying their season low with just four hits on Thursday, all of which were singles.

Reliever Steve Bray matched a team-high with three innings of relief work to grab his first win of the year. The right-hander gave up one hit with a walk and three strikeouts in a scoreless effort.

Closer Chad Cordero earned the second save of his 2010 campaign after putting together a perfect 1.1 innings of work through the eighth and ninth. The outing was the right-hander's second relief appearance in as many games.

Collecting the loss was Sacramento starter Lenny DiNardo, who gave up both Rainiers runs, one earned, over 4.1 innings, along with two walks and two strikeouts.

Tacoma's Steven Shell gave up the lone River Cats run in a short four-inning start, while walking three and fanning five in a no decision.

The Rainiers begin their first road trip of the season tomorrow night when they head to Salt Lake to take on the Bees in a four-game series, then round out their jaunt with a four-game set at Colorado Springs.

### **Innovation never stops as River Cats try to fill Raley Field**

John Schumacher, Sacramento Bee, 4/16/2010

While workers put the finishing touches Thursday on Raley Field for tonight's home opener against the Reno Aces at 7:05 – hosing down seats, hanging signs, prepping the infield – River Cats executives talked about innovation.

When fans arrive at the West Sacramento park for the team's 11th season, they'll find a new 800-square foot high-definition video board with a 44-foot diagonal screen, Diamond Club seats offering all-you-can eat concessions and a new food vendor with a fresh bent on ballpark treats.

Coming off a decade that included stunning on-field success, record-setting crowds and a grass-roots connection to the community, the River Cats consider change essential to survival.

Especially with average attendance at Raley Field in a slow decline from a peak of 12,517 in 2001 to 9,126 in 2009.

"The fun and the challenge for us year in and year out is finding out how to make it new, how to make it fresh, how to spark in people's minds, 'Hey, we want to come out,' " said Alan Ledford, team president and general manager.

Winning certainly helps. But the Triple-A minor-league team in the Oakland A's organization hasn't been able to stop the slide in attendance – still the best in the minor leagues during the past 10 years – despite winning four Pacific Coast League championships and eight division titles in 10 seasons.

So team officials focus on creating an entertaining, memorable and affordable experience with a variety of promotions and amenities and tickets priced as low as \$7.

Some ideas turn into home runs. Others strike out.

The River Cats expect the new video board to become a huge success.

In a way, it highlights the team's effort to build deep community roots.

Rancho Cordova's D3 LED manufactured the screen, which was assembled by workers from PRIDE Industries, a Roseville-based nonprofit that employs people with disabilities.

"This is the most significant investment that's been made since Raley Field was built," said Ledford, who declined to reveal the screen's cost.

"It's a centerpiece of the experience."

Diamond Club seats at the top of the section behind home plate offer all-you-can eat food, built-in counter space and extra leg room for \$42.

"Everyone with a 15-year-old should buy one," said Jennifer Castleberry, the team's senior director of marketing, events & entertainment.

Ovations, the new food vendor, offers fresh fare ranging from meatball sandwiches to buffalo chicken salad. Fans will also find new flat-screen TVs around the stadium.

New promotions include free meals for seniors on Mondays and kids on Tuesdays. Returning ones include the popular \$1 hot dog and ice cream Fridays and Kids Run The Bases Sundays.

Old staples like Saturday night fireworks remain at Raley Field, which USA Today listed as one of 10 great places for a baseball pilgrimage.

Some ideas go down swinging. Throwback Mondays debuted last season, with more organ music, fewer recorded songs and an attempt to create more of an old-time feel to appeal to seniors.

It's no longer on the roster.

"Throwback Mondays, I'd say maybe was an idea that didn't resonate with the fans," said Ripper Hatch, vice president of ticket sales.

While major-league call-ups and minor-league demotions turn the River Cats' roster into a revolving door, the chance to see a future big-league star remains a lure for fans.

Former River Cats pitcher Barry Zito went on to win an American League Cy Young Award and was a three-time All-Star. Pitcher Justin Duchscherrer, an All-Star in 2005, and infielders Eric Hinske and Bobby Crosby, both A.L. Rookies of the Year, also played for Sacramento.

"There's an expectation they're going to come to Raley Field and perhaps interact with one of these players who perhaps one day will become an icon," Castleberry said.

Connecting to the community remains a priority. The River Cats' outreach program includes Triple-A Assemblies at local schools and Home Run Tours at Raley Field.

When high school baseball coaches kept calling asking if their teams could play at Raley Field, the team came up with a win-win solution.

Instead of charging teams to play, the River Cats sold tickets to them at a discount so the teams could sell the seats as a fundraiser and then rewarded them with a game at Raley Field.

This season, the River Cats expanded the program to include junior varsity teams.

"It's the experience of a lifetime," Hatch said. "We're trying to create memories."

And constantly looking for new ways to do it.

"We are never finished innovating," Ledford said. "To some, that might be frustrating. To those of us in this business, it's what makes it fun and, frankly, why we come to work every day."

## **'Hounds Roll Behind Gilbert's Grand Slam**

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

So said the 1960's rock (well, kinda rock) group, Herman's Hermits, and they might as well have been talking about the RockHounds' 2010 season.

On opening night of the 2010 season, the RockHounds blasted the Arkansas Travelers, 11-1, at Citibank Ballpark.

On opening night at Dickey-Stephens Park in North Little Rock, Arkansas, the 'Hounds howled again, defeating the Travs by that same score.

Archie Gilbert was the hero ... or "culprit," depending on your point of view ... launching a Grand Slam home run in a 5-run fourth inning.

Moments before Archie's blast, the 'Hounds ... leading, 1-0 ... denied a Travelers threat, shutting down a rally with a strike 'em out, throw 'em out double play. Andrew Romine (who entered the game 6-for-12 against the RockHounds) whiffed, and Clay Fuller (an 80% base stealer at Single-A) was caught o the play. The play maintained the 1-0 lead, and Archie's slam the trned the tide for good.

Carlos Hernandez went 5.2 strong innings, allowing just two hits and one (unearned) run. Justin Souza and Justin Friend went the rest of the way to seal the win.

Both Archie and Alex Valdez drove in four runs ... Corey Brown had a 3-hit game ... and Jemile Weeks had a pair of doubles, including a shot to left on the first pitch of the game.

### **Pitching Probables & Results at Arkansas**

Thurs. - RockHounds 11 Travelers 1

Fri. - Pedro Figueroa (0-0, 7.20) vs. Jeremy Thorne (0-0, 9.64)

Sat. - Anthony Capra (0-1, 3.86) vs. Michael Anton (1-0, 1.80)

### **Pitching Probables at Springfield**

Sun. - Ben Hornbeck (0-0, 7.71) vs. David Kopp (0-0, 9.00)

Mon. - Travis Banwart (2-0, 2.53) vs. Shaun Garceau (0-2, 2.79)

Tues. - Carlos Hernandez (0-0, 6.23) vs. Nick Addition (0-0, 3.60)

## **Ports Fall to Rawhide, 6-2, in Home Opener**

Stockton Ports, 4/16/2010

After returning on home to Banner Island Ballpark after a solid 4-2 road trip through Visalia and Bakersfield, the Ports hot bats turned cold. The Ports dropped their home opener, 6-2, against Visalia, collecting a season-low five hits in the contest.

Ports starter Murphy Smith had a rough outing, pitching just 3.1 innings, and allowing five runs on eight hits, including two home runs. The Ports relievers Lance Sewell, Scott Deal and Jose Pina were strong for the club, combining for one run on seven hits and five strikeouts in the final 5.2 frames.

Only one of the five Ports hits was for extra bases, as Jermaine Mitchell led off the game with a double to center field. Stephen Parker and Tyler Ladendorf each collected an RBI in the game.

Stockton pulled ahead to a quick 1-0 lead in the first. Left fielder Mitchell doubled and was followed on base by shortstop Grant Green who singled. Parker then reached on a fielder's choice and Mitchell scored. Right fielder Jeremy Barfield then hit a sacrifice bunt to advance the runners. First baseman Michael Spina struck out, and then center fielder David Thomas reached first after being hit on the wrist with a pitch. The Ports left all three runners stranded at the end of the first.

Visalia came roaring back in the top of the second, as designated hitter Kyle Greene made it 3-1 in one stroke. He lifted a 1-1 pitch back over the Jackson Rancheria Back Porch in right field for a three-run home run, his first homer of the season.

First baseman Paul Goldschmidt extended the Visalia lead with a solo shot on a 3-2 pitch off Smith in the third inning-his third home run of the year-to the center field Metro PCS Home Run Hill.

Greene scored his second run of the game in the fourth inning. He doubled to lead off the frame, and came around to score on an RBI single by shortstop Rey Navarro. Visalia made it 6-1 in the seventh inning as an RBI double by left fielder Marc Krauss scored Goldschmidt.

In the ninth, the Ports looked to rally. With one out, Barfield was walked by Visalia reliever T.J. Hose. Barfield advanced on a single by Spina. Thomas struck out next. With two out and two on, Ladendorf singled to right field and Barfield came around quickly to score. Designated hitter Kala Ka'aihue grounded out to end the game with two left on base.

The Ports will play Game 2 of the four game set on Friday at 7:05 p.m. at Banner Island Ballpark. RHP Kenny Smalley (0-0, 1.80) will take the hill for Stockton, while LHP Pat McAnaney (1-0, 5.40) will start for Visalia. The first 1,000 fans to enter the game will receive a Dallas Braden Jersey-T giveaway. Fans can also see A's legend and Hall of Famer Rickey Henderson, who will be performing his roving instructor duties with the Ports all weekend long.

## **The Cardiac Cougars Strike Again**

**GENEVA, III.** - For the second time in four games on their current homestand, the Kane County Cougars rallied for three runs in the bottom of the ninth and won. Thursday night they erased a 4-2 deficit with Myrio Richard's game-winning three-run double and beat the Beloit Snappers, 5-4, in front of 2,669 at Elfstrom Stadium. Richard went 3-for-5 with a trio of extra-base hits to keep the Cougars above .500 and move them to 4-1 on the nine-game homestand.

Starter Dan Straily gave the Cougars a solid outing. He gave up two runs on six hits over 5 2/3 innings and was taken off the hook for a loss in the sixth. Kent Walton delivered a sacrifice fly, and Max Stassi doubled in Richard to tie it, 2-2. Then Beloit managed an unearned run in the seventh against Connor Hoehn and one more run in the eighth to pull ahead, 4-2.

In the bottom of the ninth, Beloit reliever Matt Tone (0-1), who had struck out the side in the eighth, walked Mike Gilmartin and Tyreace House. Gilmartin was cut down at third on Nino Leyja's fielder's choice bunt, but Conner Crumbliss walked to load the bases. Kane Holbrooks took over for Tone, and Richard launched a double off the fence in left-center, scoring all three runs for the walk-off finish. A.J. Huttenlocker (1-0) picked up the victory after his 1-2-3 ninth.

The Cougars (5-3) and Snappers (3-5) wrap up the three-game set Friday night at 6:30 CT. Chris Mederos (1-0, 0.00) will face Brad Stillings (0-1, 1.80). Then the Cougars welcome Cedar Rapids to town on Saturday for the final leg of the homestand.