

A's News Clips, Friday, May 7, 2010

Low Coliseum turnout no surprise to new A's

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 5/7/2010

Playing in front of empty seats at the Oakland Coliseum is as commonplace for A's players as taking batting practice.

The team's attendance woes have drawn increased attention recently, particularly after the A's drew just 8,874 to Monday's game against the Texas Rangers, their smallest announced crowd since 2003.

For those who have been with the team a while, the sparse turnouts are a fact of life. But the A's imported several new players this season, some of whom came from the National League and didn't have much exposure to the Coliseum before this year.

What's been their reaction?

"It didn't really catch me off-guard," said third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff, who spent the past three seasons with the Padres. "Some of the guys said in spring training that we didn't draw too well. I didn't expect too many fans. In San Diego, we didn't draw too well. I just looked up (in the stands earlier this season) and said, 'Well, that's the way it is.' "

But Kouzmanoff has formed another impression as well.

"The fans we do draw are die-hard, hard-core fans," he said. "They're beating their drums, waving their flags."

The A's home attendance has decreased each of the last six seasons. So it isn't much of a surprise that they've averaged just 16,552 fans through 17 home games this year, even as they lead the American League West.

But the A's, who welcome the Tampa Bay Rays for the start of a three-game series tonight, aren't the only team encountering this problem.

During Oakland's recent series in Toronto, the Toronto Sun ran a lengthy story about the Blue Jays' struggles at the gate. Tampa Bay sported the major leagues' best record when the A's visited for a two-game series last week but drew less than 11,000 for each game.

Pitcher Ben Sheets, who spent eight seasons with Milwaukee before joining Oakland this winter, shrugged off the small crowds at the Coliseum.

"Most teams really don't draw great until school's out," Sheets said.

But he later added: "You've got one of the best organizations in history. That's what's crazy. With the history that's been in Oakland, it seems like it would draw more fans."

Outfielder Gabe Gross played in front of small crowds with both Tampa Bay and Toronto. He echoed Kouzmanoff's sentiments about how passionate A's fans that do attend games are. But he also said a full stadium inspires a team.

"I heard that announced crowd (Monday), that's obviously not that many," said Gross, who signed this winter. "Have I ever played in front of that many (in the majors)? I don't know. I hope it doesn't get any lower, though."

Kouzmanoff stressed that attendance shouldn't be the main factor that lights a player's fire. "I think you still have to play baseball and get yourself up and going," he said. "For me it's the same whether there's 5,000 or 40,000."

Notes: Catcher Kurt Suzuki, on the disabled list with a strained rib cage muscle, said he would try throwing Thursday. He's eligible to be activated Sunday but wasn't sure if he'd be ready by then. ... Fellow catcher Landon Powell was named to the College World Series Legends Team.

Chance for revenge on baseball's best team

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Last week, the A's went to Tampa Bay for a two-game series and dropped both by a combined score of 19-8.

Tonight, the Rays come to Oakland for a rematch of first-place clubs, and the A's are coming off a series victory over Texas. Oakland has won four of five series at the Coliseum this year.

Tampa Bay has won three in a row and eight of its past 10.

"Obviously, they're hot," A's closer **Andrew Bailey** said. "They're a good team. They pitch well, they hit well. The key is probably to keep them off base, have our starters go deep, and hopefully get an early lead and keep going."

The Rays' 21 wins are the most in the majors.

"They appear, along with the Yankees, to be the best team in the league," designated hitter **Eric Chavez** said. "They have speed, power, pitching and defense. We gave it up on the road, so this will be a better test."

Draft doings: The June draft begins one month from today, and the A's are in crazed scouting mode. They have the 10th overall pick, and scouting director **Eric Kubota** is on the road seeing high school and college players 23 to 25 days a month. That's nothing, though. Kubota laughingly describes **Billy Owens**, the team's director of player personnel, as being on a 100-day road trip. Owens said he's gone about 95 percent of the time leading up to the draft.

Last year, the A's made an unexpected choice with their fourth-round pick, **Max Stassi**, a high school catcher from Yuba City who was expected to attend UCLA rather than sign. This year, high schoolers again might be better bets. Kubota said the general consensus is the draft is light on college position players, better on college pitchers and high school players.

Cal, Kubota's alma mater, has some possible draft choices, while Stanford is a little down this year.

As usual, the A's aren't targeting one specific area to go after. "We're always looking to put the best players on the field, so we'll go with the flow of the draft," Kubota said.

A's leading off

Susan Slusser, San Francisco Chronicle

Day and night: Oakland is 8-3 in day games, but 7-11 in night games going into the series opener against Tampa Bay. The A's are hitting .267 during the day and averaging 4.8 runs; at night, it's .245 and 4.1 runs per game.

Ziegler winds up for Pastime for Patriots

Initiative to launch in conjunction with Salute to Armed Forces

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- When a young Brad Ziegler brought home a Revolutionary War assignment, his father fondly remembers the history project turning into something of a family activity.

"We ended up enacting the whole thing out," Greg Ziegler recalls.

The memory of those days is somewhat a blur now, but the passion exuded in those moments for selfless soldiers has since stayed with Brad, now 30 and a member of Oakland's own corps known as the bullpen.

"I know that I always grew up liking history, especially war history," Brad Ziegler says. "So I watched a lot of movies, read a lot of books. The more I did, the more I realized the incredible sacrifice that these people are going through just to put our country in a position right now where we have all these freedoms. I mean, it's a great country to live in."

It's one that has allowed the ballplayer to not only live out his dreams on the field, but also take advantage of his status as a member of the green and gold to support those battling in faraway lands for the pride and protection of the red, white and blue.

Such opportunity will officially transform into a charity Saturday when Brad Ziegler, with parents Greg and Lisa watching from the stands, launches the creation of his Pastime for Patriots Foundation. The commencement will aptly fall in conjunction with the A's Salute to Armed Forces Day and award 400 tickets to military families for Oakland's afternoon matchup with Tampa Bay.

Ziegler has purchased 200 of the tickets -- a donation matched by the A's Community Fund to aid in the efforts of providing a day at the ballpark for family members of troops who are currently overseas and those who have recently returned from action.

Through the foundation, the A's pitcher plans on making his purchase of baseball tickets for these families an ongoing endeavor, one he hopes expands through several other Major League parks as quickly as the charity formed.

"This past offseason was when everything started coming together," Ziegler said. "I always felt like I could contribute, but I never felt like I was in a position to head something up. I was hoping I'd have enough name recognition at some point to where, if I were going to put my name on something, it would have a little credibility.

"Just seeing other ballplayers start their own foundations and working on something they're passionate about, I thought, 'You know what? I'm going to try something.'"

Now, months later, Pastime for Patriots is already owner of a logo -- one that will hopefully soon receive the stamp of a copyright -- along with a forming web site that will be up and running shortly. In the meantime, though, Ziegler is focused on interacting with the people who initially inspired his cause.

"The more you get in touch with these people we're helping, the more you understand their situation and how difficult it can be," he said. "I know very well how hard it can be on a family to be traveling all the time and to be away from home and from your kids. These people are doing the same thing, except they're going months and sometimes years without seeing their family members.

"I feel like if we can get them to the ballpark for a day and ease some of the costs of that, take their minds off of what's going on, that to me is the big initiative. Let's get these people out of the house for a night, no matter what it costs."

Ziegler will buy 150 tickets per game for families on July 9, Aug. 6 and Sept. 21, when the A's Community Fund will once again match those purchases. Furthermore, a large portion of the money raised through his foundation will eventually contribute to college scholarships for high school students who have had a parent killed in action.

The A's pitcher, now a father to 2 1/2-year-old Kaylin, grew up surrounded by a close family and a large dose of faith in Odessa, Mo., where his parents raised him in a nurturing environment, but at the same time reminded him that not all are so fortunate.

"I never had to grow up without a parent, and I can't imagine -- whether you're an infant or a junior in high school -- what that's like," he said. "It's going to change their life from that point on from what it would have been. I don't want that to be any kind of hindrance for them for possibly furthering their education to be able to do something later in life."

Ziegler is hoping enough funds will be in place for what he envisions to be the first of several abundant scholarships by May 2011. Additionally, he plans to provide care packages for a handful of Bay Area brigades and battalions stationed overseas, where he's also planning a trip this offseason. And all those interested in supporting the pitcher's efforts -- whether simply through learning more about the charity or by making donations -- can visit tables on Saturday set up by the Oakland Coliseum concourse level.

"Anything we receive from then on will be tax-deductable," he assured. "I want to do everything I can to make sure that my donations to the foundation cover the maintenance costs -- kind of the grunt work -- and everyone else who donates, their money is going directly to these troops and their families."

Much of said grunt work is currently being handled by the pitcher's agents, Rob Martin and Matt Cormier, who want their client to keep much of his focus on the mound. After all, it's work as a Major League reliever that has created opportunities to help those in need.

"I got to wear the stars and stripes and play on the field," he said. "Now is the time where I can take the stars and stripes thing a little further and hopefully do some good with it. This isn't just something I hope to do throughout my playing career but something I hope to be a part of the rest of my life."

His father, for one, believes the charity will take on a life of its own -- much like the recreation of the Revolutionary War did in his living room a couple decades ago.

"He believes in justice and in pursuing things that are right," Greg Ziegler said. "It's not a blind following, by any means. I think he does have a real appreciation for the freedoms that we have, and he knows that people have made a lot of sacrifices for us to have those freedoms."

"I'm grateful that he accepts the responsibility to do something good with the way that he is blessed. Brad has been given a lot of gifts and great privileges, and he's worked hard. I'm thankful he's interested in giving back and not just accumulating things for himself."

Lee's Leftovers: A's now owners of a bountiful bullpen

When Tye Waller walked out with the lineup this morning, he sported a rather large smile on his face -- not an uncommon sight, but one that this time came with a look that signaled something was up. "Now there's a little something different in there today," the A's bench coach said. "But I'm not going to tell you. You reporters are smart enough to figure it out yourself." And with that, I -- along with everyone else -- quickly scanned the bullpen list and noticed an extra name. That's right, folks, we now have an eight-man bullpen in tow with the welcoming addition of Henry Rodriguez. The A's shipped out Vin Mazzaro last night following his short-lived season debut, one that was filled with one too many walks for Mr. Bob Geren's taste.

The A's skipper is hoping the club will be able to string along a four-man rotation until Justin Duchscherer -- scheduled to get a cortisone shot this afternoon -- is back in action. Oakland has two days off soon (tomorrow and Monday), so the next time they'll need a fifth starter is May 15 in Anaheim.

As for Mazzaro, his control is not where it needs to be. Nor is his mindset. He seemed to think he threw pretty well last night, but every pitch following the second inning said otherwise. He needs to realize that settling for a mediocre performance is not acceptable up here -- something I don't think ever sank in during his struggling period last season.

Nevertheless, the A's now have a fully stocked bullpen, and Geren said all arms -- aside from maybe Wuertz -- are available

for today's game. I'd assume the manager would prefer to place Rodriguez in a non-pressure situation in his first appearance, but as we saw last night, sometimes that's not an option. Rodriguez consistently throws in the mid-90s and often hits 100 on the gun, but he also often has command issues, as was the case in spring. Getting him to throw strikes will be key.

On another note, I'd like to introduce you all to Alex Espinoza, who will be helping me out as an associate reporter for the remainder of the season at all home games. Alex comes to us from grad school at Arizona State, and he'll be contributing to A's coverage in a number of ways, so be on the lookout for his work. In the meantime, I'm hoping that Alex's presence frees me up a bit to not only blog more but work on some more in-depth and feature stories. So it's a win-win situation for everyone. MLB.com runs a great internship program, one that I can thank for my start here. As some of you may recall, I was Mychael Urban's intern two years ago and have since climbed the ranks because of that experience.

Oakland A's Dallas Braden says New York Yankees Alex Rodriguez in a mound of trouble

BY [Mark Feinsand](#), [Peter Botte](#), [Wayne Coffey](#) AND [Matt Gagne](#) , DAILY NEWS SPORTS WRITERS

[Dallas Braden](#) clearly isn't over [Alex Rodriguez](#) treading on his mound. The [Oakland](#) pitcher gave an interview to CSNBayArea.com Wednesday in which he indicated that there could be a fight the next time the A's and [Yankees](#) meet.

In a video on the site, the interviewer, [Mychael Urban](#), referred to Braden's postgame comment on April 22 that there'd be repercussions if A-Rod did it again and asked if he was talking about settling the spat with "knuckles." Braden replied, "Well, I mean that's pretty much the long and short of it.

"On a serious note, obviously there's things that are going to have to happen just out of respect for my teammates, out of respect for the game," Braden added. "I think he's probably garnered a new respect for the unwritten rules and people who hold them close to their game."

Asked about A-Rod's comment that he'd never heard of the unwritten rule about mound-walking, "especially from a guy with a handful of wins in his career," Braden replied, "I was always taught if you give a fool enough rope, he'll hang himself and with those comments, he had all the rope he needed."

During the interview, Braden added that he was no fan of A-Rod's and said it wasn't the first time Rodriguez had displayed a "lack of respect for the game or those playing it. ... He's just an individualistic player."

In case you're wondering, the Yanks visit Oakland July 5-7 and then the A's come to the [Bronx](#) for a four-game series at the end of August.

TIME WARP

Umpires were not directed to pay special attention to pace-of-game enforcement when the Yankees and [Red Sox](#) start a weekend series at Fenway tonight, according to two [Major League Baseball](#) officials. Pace of game is an issue near and dear to commissioner [Bud Selig](#)'s heart, but he's sent no speed-it-up missives about this series, one said. Umpires will only follow "normal pace of game enforcement," that person said.

Veteran umpire Joe West created a furor during the teams' first series of the season last month in Boston when he called them "pathetic and embarrassing" for their plodding play. The Red Sox and Yankees are the two slowest teams in baseball. Boston games average about three hours and 11 minutes and the Yankees average about 3:07. By contrast, the team averaging the fastest games is Oakland - about 2:39.

MLB officials met with each team during spring training to discuss pace-of-game issues. The Yankees have been visited by MLB's time cops multiple times in recent years because they have averaged the longest games in baseball in 10 of the last 11 seasons. Last season, the Yanks averaged about 3:08, around 16 minutes slower than the MLB average.

In case you're wondering if West will be working the games, he won't. One official said Tim McClelland's crew - McClelland, Mike Everitt, Andy Fletcher and Adrian Johnson - will work the series. There were no changes made to keep West away from the series, the official said.

PETTITTE PROGRESS?

Ailing lefty Andy Pettitte called the Yanks' team doctor yesterday to tell him he was "feeling good," according to GM Brian Cashman. But that might not be enough for Pettitte to take his regular turn in the rotation Tuesday in Detroit. Cashman said he and Joe Girardi and the rest of the team's staff would gather today to make a decision on whether Pettitte will miss a start because of the elbow stiffness the pitcher has felt in each of his last two outings. "I'm inclined to skip him a start, but that's not officially what we're going to do yet," Cashman said. "We're going to discuss it." Pettitte will be with the Yankees in Boston.

As for the other banged-up members of the "Core Four," Cashman believes Mariano Rivera (side) will be available to close tonight but is less sure about Jorge Posada (right calf strain). "He might need more time," Cashman said. "That'll be evaluated on a daily basis. But Mo will be ready (today)."

MINOR LEAGUE NEWS

Salt Lake battles past Sacramento

By Annie Becker / Sacramento River Cats

Corey Brown's three-run homer in the ninth inning wasn't enough as the Sacramento River Cats fell 5-4 to the Salt Lake Bees on Thursday night at Raley Field. Salt Lake took three of four games in the series.

Sean O'Sullivan, who no-hit the River Cats last season, allowed one run and four hits over 7.0 innings Thursday. O'Sullivan recorded the first nine-inning no-hitter in Bees history on July 29, 2009, against Sacramento at Raley Field.

The Sacramento defense, last in the league in errors and first in unearned runs allowed, broke down again in the third inning as the Bees scored four unearned runs on two errors and two hits. The River Cats have now committed a league-worst 38 errors and have allowed 41 unearned runs (31 percent of their total runs allowed). Third baseman Adrian Cardenas and starting pitcher Graham Godfrey were responsible for the River Cats errors, both on fielder's choice plays. Eric Sogard later made a throwing error.

Back-to-back gem catches by Corey Brown and Corey Wimberly were crowd-pleasers and ended the fourth quickly for the Bees. Brown stretched out for a great catch to deep center field, crashing into the wall. Wimberly and shortstop Michael Affronti almost got tangled on a hit to shallow left field, but Affronti leaped over a tumbling Wimberly who made the catch.

Wimberly's full-count homer in the sixth put the Cats on the board in hopes of starting the offensive momentum. It was Wimberly's first home run of 2010 and first since July 31, 2007, when he was playing for Tulsa in the Texas League.

River Cats catcher Anthony Recker, who returned from a knee injury after getting spiked during a play at the plate in Monday's game, threw out Peter Bourjos on an attempted steal. Nate Sutton scored what turned out to be the game-

deciding run in the eighth inning after a controversial call at second on a steal attempt. Recker's throw appeared to arrive in plenty of time, but umpire Jason Millsap ruled that Sogard's attempted tag missed Bourjos' leg.

Sacramento will start a new series Friday night against Colorado Springs Sky Sox at 7:05 pm.

Injuries and Errors Hurt Hounds In Loss

By Bob Hards / Midland RockHounds

It seemed fitting that Thursday night's losing pitcher, Derrick Gordon, lowered his earned run average by almost two points en route to the "L."

Gordon was the victim of two errors on one play, with the miscues leading to a pair of unearned runs that broke a 1-1 tie. That would be the ballgame, as the Corpus Christi Hooks snapped a 5-game losing streak to the RockHounds with a 3-1 win in front of 4,084 at Citibank Ballpark Thursday night.

After a one-out walk to Koby Clemens, Hooks designated hitter Jimmy Van Ostrand singled to center with Clemens moving as far as second. Matt Sulentic bobbled the ball in center just long enough for Clemens to move to third. 'Hounds shortstop Yung-Chi Chen then tried to catch Van Ostrand off the bag at first, but threw the ball away. Clemens scored and Van Ostrand moved all the way around to third as the throw went out of play. A sacrifice fly then scored him with second run. Factor out the errors and neither run would have scored. Ouch.

In the first inning, Jemile Weeks was injured running to first base and left the game. Ouch.

Starter Carlos Hernandez struggled. He allowed just one run on three hits (two of them infield singles), but didn't appear to be at 100% and departed (nothing definitive as to why) after just 3.0 innings. Ouch.

Then came the errors. Ouch.

The only good news was the return of reliever Jared Lansford, who had last pitched April 23. While not on the D-L, "Lanny" had been sidelined with tightness in his throwing arm. He threw a 1-2-3 eighth inning with two strikeouts.

The Corpus Christi bullpen was ridiculously good in wrapping the game up. Henry Villar and Danny Meszaros combined for 3.0 innings, allowing no runs, no hits and one walk with seven strikeouts. Both are considered top 30 prospects in the Houston Astros' organization.

The 'Hounds conclude their quick, 4-game home stand Friday night, facing Corpus Christi Thursday (Cap Night) with the first pitch set for 7:00. The RockHounds then travel to Frisco for their first meetings of the season against the RoughRiders, a series running Saturday through Tuesday in the Metroplex.

Ports Rally Falls Short in 7-5 loss to Giants

STOCKTON, Calif. - The Stockton Ports (12-15) narrowly avoided being shutout at home for the first time this season by the San Jose Giants (14-11), by scoring five runs with two out in the ninth inning. The Ports brought up the tying run to the plate, but Josh Horton struck out swinging to end the game, 7-5.

The Ports collected nine hits, but were unable to bring home any runs in the first eight innings of the game. Stockton ended the game with 12 hits and 10 left on base. Shortstop Grant Green went 5x5 with an RBI and Michael Spina collected a grand slam with two out in the ninth for the Ports.

Ports starter Murphy Smith collected his second loss of the season, allowing two runs on five hits in 5.0 innings with seven strikeouts. San Jose starter Justin Fitzgerald allowed seven hits with a walk in 6.0 innings for the Giants, and picked up his third win. Joe Paterson notched his first save.

The Giants pulled ahead to a 2-0 lead in the third inning. Second baseman Charlie Culberson singled to jumpstart the offense-it was the first San Jose hit of the game. Shortstop Ehire Adrianza singled, and advanced to second on an error by Shane Keough. Both runners scored on a single by center fielder James Simmons. The Giants but two more runners on base, but Smith struck out first baseman Brandon Belt to end the inning.

San Jose collected their next three runs off Ports reliever Scott Hodsdon. San Jose made it 3-0 in the sixth on a solo home run by designated hitter Drew Biery to the bullpens in left field. They added another pair of runs in the seventh inning on an RBI triple by Simmons and an RBI single by left fielder Wendell Fairley.

Belt scored the sixth San Jose run in the eighth inning as Green committed a fielding error while Chris Monell was at-bat. With the bases loaded and one out, Biery came around to score and make it 7-0 as Adrianza was hit by a pitch.

UNC product Andrew Carignan held the Giants scoreless in the ninth. The Ports headed into the bottom of the ninth facing being shutout at home, despite collecting nine hits. With one out, Ports centerfielder Jose Crisotomo singled. Then Stockton catcher Ryan Ortiz struck out. Keough worked a walk to put two on for Green.

Green slammed the ball to deep center field and both Simmons and Fairley watch the ball drop between them and bounce up and into the Ports bullpen for a ground-rule double. The hit, Green's fifth on the night, scored Crisotomo. Stockton third baseman Stephen Parker then walked to load the bases with two out for first baseman Michael Spina. Spina launched a home run, his third on the year and second in as many game, to deep left field. The grand slam cut the deficit 7-5 for Stockton. Designated hitter Jeremy Barfield then walked, and the Giants called upon Joe Paterson to pitch to Horton, who represented the tying run. Horton struck out to end the game, and give the Giants the 2-1 series victory.

The Ports will travel to Bakersfield for five games in four days. They will take on the Blaze at 7:15 p.m. on Friday. RHP Kenny Smalley (2-1, 4.28) will start for Stockton, while RHP Wilfredo Boscan (1-4, 5.46) will be on the mound for Bakersfield.

Gil, Straily Lead Cougars to a Sweep

Kane County 6-0 vs. Burlington, ends 7-game trip with 3-4 mark

BURLINGTON, Iowa – The Kane County Cougars wrapped up a seven-game road trip and returned to the .500 mark on Thursday afternoon after a 7-4 victory over the Burlington Bees at Community Field. Leonardo Gil nailed a three-run homer and missed the cycle by a triple, and Dan Straily posted six shutout innings for his third win. The Cougars, who started the trip by getting swept in Cedar Rapids, swept the Bees and improved to 6-0 against them this season.

Gil's three-run shot in the fourth off Tyler Sample (1-1) gave the Cougars a 3-0 cushion, and they added single runs over the next three innings. Juan Nunez tripled home Nino Leyja in the fifth, Leyja singled in Rashun Dixon in the sixth and Mike Gilmartin scampered home in the seventh on a wild pitch. The Cougars' final run came in the ninth on a Myrio Richard RBI groundout. All nine players either walked, had a hit or drove in a run.

Straily (3-1) gave up five hits, walked one and fanned seven over his six innings, giving the Cougars their third quality start of the series. He faced the minimum three times and yielded just one extra-base hit. Bo Schultz tossed two scoreless innings in Straily's stead, and Hector Garcia got touched for four runs -- one earned -- in the ninth before ending it.

The Cougars (14-14) are back at Elfstrom Stadium for a three-game series with the Peoria Chiefs (18-10) that starts Friday night at 7 CT. The Cougars have not named their starting pitcher, as they need to replace the rotation spot of the injured Chris Mederos. Peoria will send Trey McNutt (1-0, 1.57) to the hill. The game will be broadcast on WBIG 1280-AM and online at www.kccougars.com, with pregame coverage starting at 6:45 p.m.